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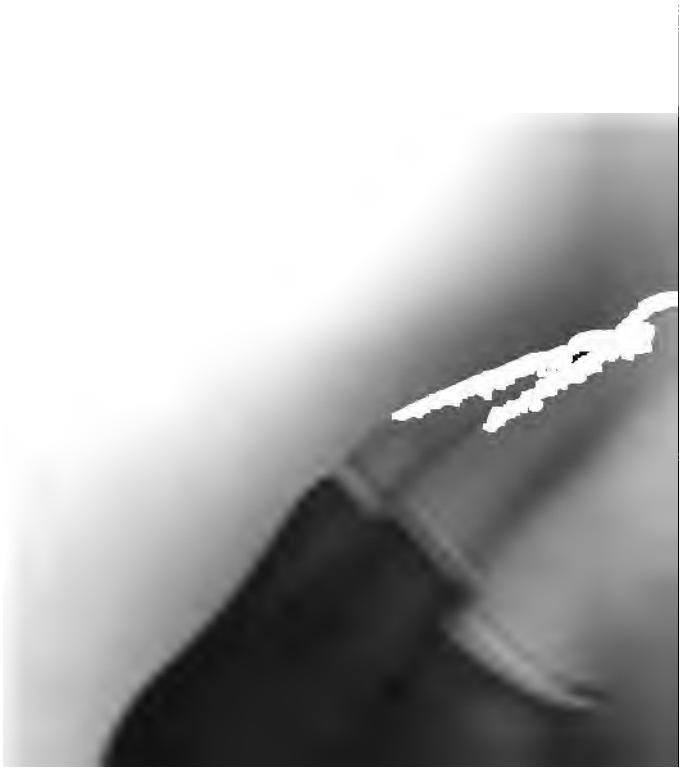
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W Y N C O T E.





W Y N C O T E.

BY

MRS. THOMAS ERSKINE,

AUTHOR OF "MARJORY."



IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

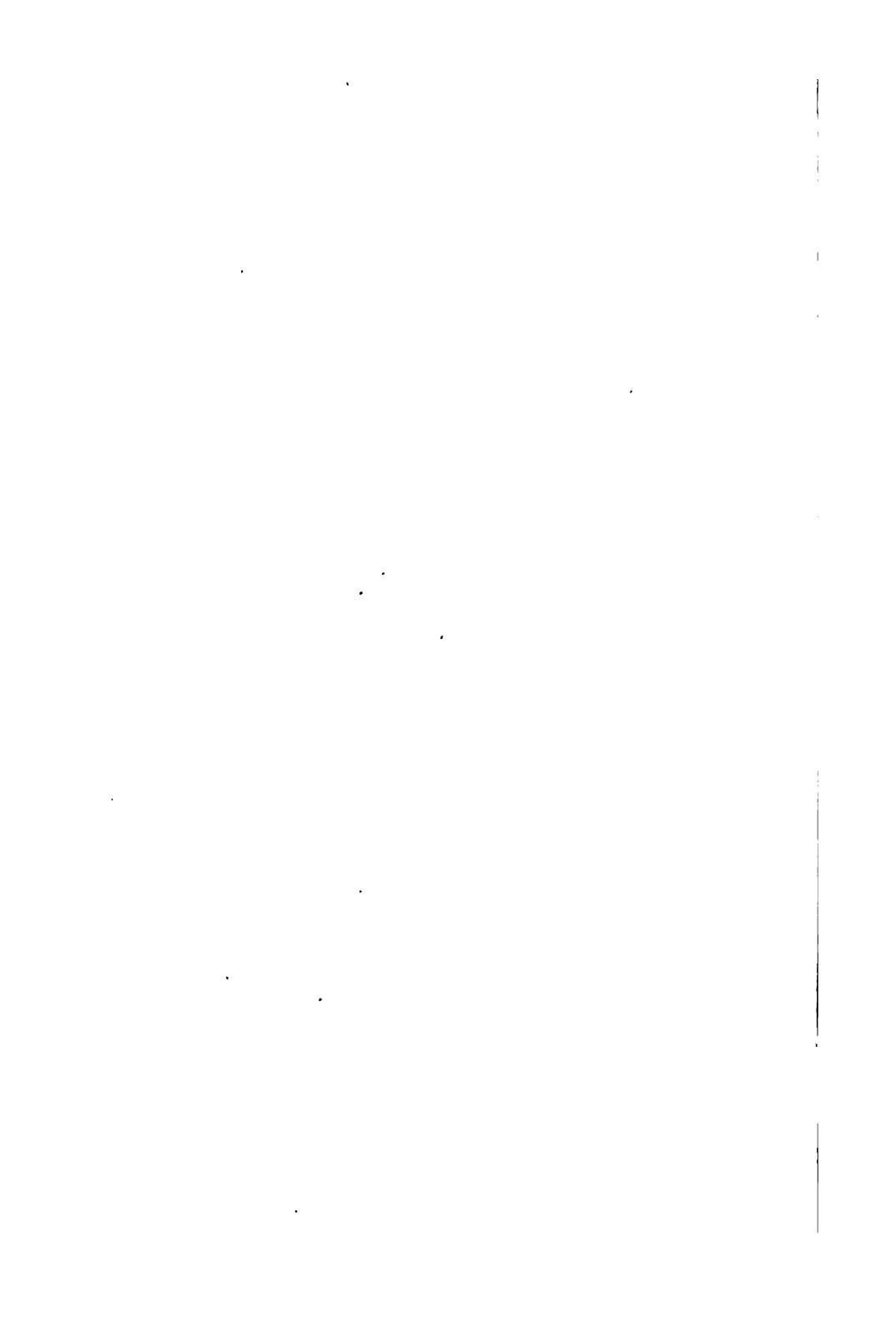
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W Y N C O T E.

CHAPTER I.

"WELL, I am thankful to think that we have nearly done with Rome!" exclaimed Mrs. Cooper, as she sank into an easy chair in her drawing-room in the Via Condotti. "Joanna, ring for Maple and put my bonnet on the table; how dreadfully tired I am!"

"Please, mamma, don't take off your bonnet till Maple brings your cap," answered a tall schoolroom girl, with strongly-marked features and a decided manner; "and, Rose, will you ring the bell while I dot off the churches we have seen to-day? Dear me! there is so much left to do, and so very little

time left to do it in. Here is San Agostino—some one said we ought to go there; and San Lorenzo, where the Guido is, we have not seen that; and what with the packing, and the tiresome picnic at the Pamphili Doria to-morrow, we shall get through very little more."

"The only thing I care to see is home, Joanna," said Mrs. Cooper, putting on the cap which the maid had brought. "Rose," she went on, turning to her eldest daughter, "has any one called to-day?"

"No one, mamma. But yes—did you know that he was here?" and the colour rushed to Rose's cheeks.

"How can I tell till I know whose card it is, Rose?"

"I thought that I had said it was George Wyncote's card, mamma."

"Oh dear, no! I had no idea that he was coming; and Miss Camilla especially begged me to call upon some artist or other, and I have forgotten all about it. Whatever shall

I do?" and Mrs. Cooper rose from her chair, full of nervous trepidation at the idea of having neglected the directions of her local potentate. "Whatever shall I do, Rose?"

"I did remind you, mamma," put in Joanna, "but you thought then that Miss Camilla was a long way off, and said that there was plenty of time; now you are so near the end of your freedom that the old lady's chains begin to be felt once more."

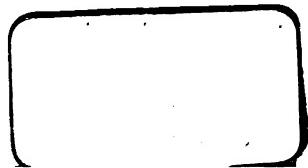
"I wish you would be more respectful in your way of speaking of Miss Camilla," said her mother. "At sixteen I should not have dared to give an opinion myself. Shall I ask them to the picnic, Rose? Every one has failed us except the Barbers, and Tytlers, and Signor Tiracelli."

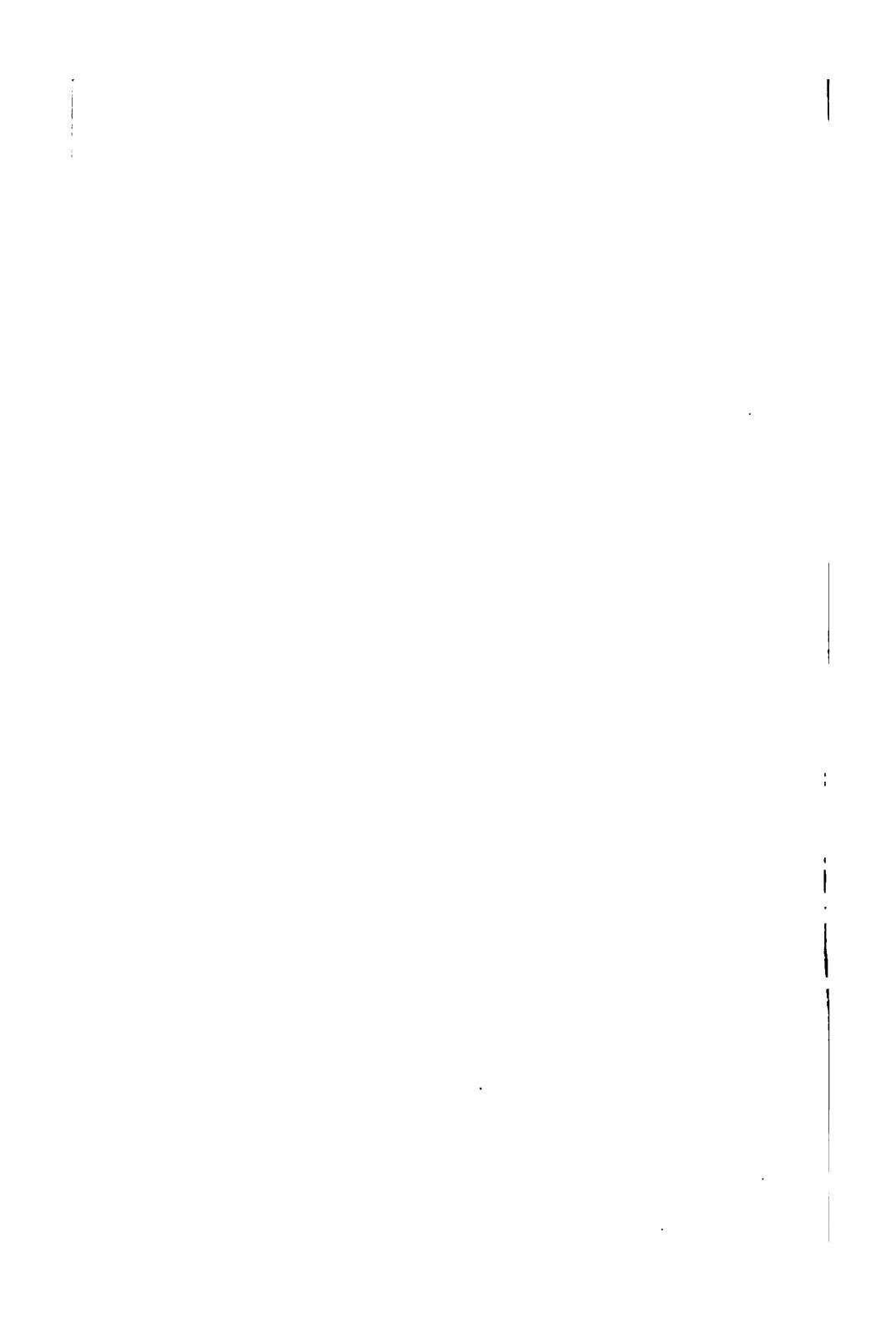
"And you can ask George, too," put in Joanna, before Rose had time to speak. "What is the artist's name, mamma?"

"Heron, Mr. Heron," said Mrs. Cooper, referring to her note-book; "and he lives in the Piazza di Spagna. Give me my blotting-book, Joanna. I will write at once."



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W Y N C O T E.

She will be told off to me, and I had so counted on there being a good-natured Mrs. Heron, who would take me about."

" You should not open my letters, Joanna. Does George come ? " asked Mrs. Cooper, as she entered the room.

" He was not at home, mamma ; but he is sure to come, and will take back a capital account of you to Miss Camilla with regard to Mr. Heron, and you will go home quite happy."

Rose had again retreated to the window, and, leaning her arm upon the window-sill, was once more looking down the street. All the light had faded away, and a great stillness seemed to be falling over the church and the long flight of steps. The street below was empty with the exception of two or three capucins, with their umbrellas under their arms, returning home after their day's begging, and a girl in black, who was walking swiftly up from the Corso.

Rose's eyes followed her as she passed

under the window; and when she stopped at the jeweller's shop on the opposite side of the street, Rose forgot the Trinita and the capucins, and home, and George Wyncote, and became absorbed in her movements.

There must have been a mutual attraction, for the girl suddenly turned and raised her eyes to the window, to the sweet English face, shaded with the soft golden hair, which was gathered up at the back of her head, and to the blue eyes looking down upon her, smiling a bright, astonished smile as their eyes met. For, instead of the Italian Rose had expected to see, the girl who looked up was as unmistakably English as herself; only, while Rose was overflowing with happiness, the stranger below seemed burdened with sorrow.

She was so full of trouble that the start, which had brought a smile into Rose's face, brought tears into her eyes, and Rose saw her features quiver as she turned away. But not to leave the spot, for there she

stood at the shop window, with her eyes fixed on the glittering treasures inside—on the brooches and bracelets, on the necklaces and earrings ; and Rose still leaned out of the window with her eyes fixed on her.

What did a girl with a face like that want at a jeweller's shop ? People in shabby black gowns, and with eyes full of tears, did not usually buy ornaments. Why did she stand there, with her hands tightly clasped round a small cardboard box, as if she were rooted to the spot ?

Her face was half turned towards Rose, who could see tear after tear run down her cheek unheeded.

Rose did not move : there was a solemnity in this mute trouble of a girl of her own age, which made her afraid of making a sound to disturb her.

But some one was going to disturb her. It was one of the fraternity for collecting alms, who was coming down the street from the Piazza di Spagna, and who, as he came

close to the weeping girl, shook his box before her.

Rose knew how it had always startled her to have this box, or one just like it, shaken at her elbow. She had always hurriedly put in a franc, in terror lest the disguised brother should be Signor Tiracelli, or some other acquaintance whom she would meet in daily life, and who would remember that she had given nothing. But either the girl had no money, or was not afraid of refusing it, for she shook her head and drew back to let the barefooted brother move on to startle some one else. For she was startled now, and, wiping her eyes, she turned the handle of the shop door and went in.

Rose could see her no longer until the jeweller was driven by the darkness to the door, where he stood with the girl behind him, her hands clasped and her eyes fixed on his face, while he held a gold cross up to catch the dim light. Rose was too high above them to hear the words, nor could

she have understood the rapid Italian they spoke even if she had heard ; but she felt sure that she understood the whole story, as the jeweller lowered his hand and gave the cross back to the girl, shaking his head at the same time.

He seemed to make some offer, but whatever it was, she apparently refused it ; for, putting the cross into the cardboard box which Rose had seen in her hand before, she passed the jeweller, and walking rapidly up the street, disappeared in the Piazza di Spagna.

CHAPTER II.

“A SIGNOR has left this note for the ladies,” announced a grinning little donna next morning at eleven o’clock, as she appeared at the drawing-room door with dishevelled hair, and an apron which had seen much service.

“How very tiresome!” exclaimed Mrs. Cooper, in an agonized tone, as she looked at Maria and took the letter; “only imagine Giacomo being out, and Maria opening the door such a figure as that, and the note is from George Wyncote. What will Miss Camilla think?”

“George is not likely to have remarked Maria, mamma. What does he say?” and Rose turned eagerly from the piano, where she was arranging her music.

“He has gone on to the Pamphili Doria,

and we shall find him under the ilexes near the entrance. He has sent me a long letter from Miss Camilla, which he forgot to bring with him yesterday evening. How very glad I am that I asked the Herons ; my mind is quite at ease now ; and besides, as the Tytlers have failed us, even one more to-day is an advantage."

"A signorina to see the ladies," said Maria, as she entered with another grin, rendered still more ghastly by her having evidently spent the interval since her last appearance in the charcoal ; and Joanna looked up full of curiosity to see what kind of companion fate had provided her with for the day.

Mr. Heron's little girl was some steps behind Maria, and, when she appeared, and Mrs. Cooper advanced to meet her with Miss Camilla's open letter in her hand, the new comer stopped and crimsoned, while Rose started and coloured also.

Mr. Heron's little girl was a young lady,

as tall as Rose herself; and what was more, Rose recognized her at once for the weeping girl of the night before. There were no tears in her eyes now, but everything else was unaltered; there was the same sad face, the same shabby gown, the same black hat, and the cross was there as well, hanging to a black ribbon round her throat.

She only paused for a moment, and then, recollecting herself, she took Mrs. Cooper's outstretched hand, and blushed still deeper as she made excuses for her father.

"Papa never goes out anywhere now," she said, in a soft, musical voice. "He told me to ask you to thank Miss Wyncote for remembering him."

"Miss Camilla will be quite delighted to hear that I have seen you. Please sit down," said Mrs. Cooper, sinking again into her chair. "I am at this moment reading a letter from her. I dare say you will forgive my finishing it. We live close to her at home, in a house I have hired from the

squire ever since poor Mr. Cooper died. Joanna was a baby, and Rose a tiny child when we went there; so we know Miss Camilla well, and she is such a very delightful person. Please sit here, close to the window; this is my daughter Rose, and this is Joanna."

Joanna put down her "Murray" most unwillingly; and an uncomfortable silence fell on every one—a silence only broken by a few unconnected sentences read aloud by Mrs. Cooper out of Miss Camilla's letter.

"She is so dull without us, Rose. I am so glad to hear that, and she is looking forward to our coming back. Then that tiresome Mary Waters has thrown up her place, after being entirely fitted out by Miss Camilla. She hopes we will take her ourselves, and she trusts that neither you nor Joanna are being drawn away by the errors of Rome. I wonder if she will think me wrong in taking you to the service at St. Peter's; at any rate, you shall not go to

the Trinita next Sunday afternoon; and, oh, Rose, can we help her? She wants a companion for Mrs. Wyncote. Just listen to what she says, 'And now can you help me in my search for a young lady who could take Miss Price's place? I have filled it myself since she left, but I am so busy with school and housekeeping, and also so perpetually in the parish, trying to remedy the defects in poor Mr. Browne's teaching (an occupation in which Mrs. Foster assists me), that I have no time even to read the papers to mamma. She is at present dependent on her maid, and she complains grievously of the change. We will give forty pounds a year; help us if you can.' I am afraid it must be uninteresting to you, Miss Heron, except for the pleasure it may give you to hear one of Miss Camilla's very well expressed letters."

"The carriage is come, mamma," said Joanna, springing to her feet. "I am so sorry I made you jump; did I frighten you?"

“Oh, no,” said Miss Heron, to whom the question was addressed, and who had been bending forward, listening eagerly to Miss Camilla’s letter with a strange look of anxiety on her face. “Can I help you with those shawls and baskets, Miss Cooper?”

“No, thank you; Giacomo will carry them down.”

And then, as Mrs. Cooper began hurriedly to lock drawers, as if she expected thieves, and Joanna to push “Murray” into her already over-full sketching-bag, Rose drew the girl into the passage, and laid her hand on her arm.

She felt so sorry for her, so grieved that she should have witnessed her distress of the evening before; she was so touched by her sweet sad face and look of utter dejection, that she could not prevent this little sign of sympathy.

“I am so sorry, Miss Heron, that I laughed when you looked up at me yesterday. I was so astonished at our eyes meet-

ing, and then, when I saw you were in trouble, I felt sure that I must have distressed you."

"You did not distress me. I only wondered if I should ever again look as happy as you did just then."

"Can I do anything for you? Can mamma?" asked Rose, eagerly.

"Do you think that she would ask Miss Wyncote to take me as companion? I can read well aloud, and I can do all kinds of needlework. I have an aunt who would pay my journey to England, though she would not send the money to help papa if I stayed here," she added bitterly.

"Now, Rose, and Miss Heron," said Mrs. Cooper, as she came out of the drawing-room, and seemed to sweep them downstairs in her bustle. "Now, Joanna, how glad I shall be when picnics and sight-seeing are over, and we can be at home and in peace."

"And with Miss Camilla," added Joanna,

as she established herself opposite her mother, and the carriage rolled away.

"Mamma," said Rose, as soon as Mrs. Cooper was satisfied that nothing had been forgotten, and that Joanna was properly wrapped up, "Miss Heron would like to go to Wyncote herself."

"Really!" exclaimed Mrs. Cooper, "as companion?"

"I should be very grateful if you would tell Miss Wyncote about me," said Miss Heron. "I am anxious to do something for myself, if I can; and, as I told Miss Cooper, I have an aunt who will pay my journey to England."

"I am sure Miss Wyncote will be delighted: and will Mr. Heron not object?"

"There is nothing else to be done," answered the girl sadly; and the carriage clattered on over the bridge and down the streets, while Mrs. Cooper was wondering how she could ask the difficult question of references. It was almost as if the girl

guessed her thoughts, for turning round suddenly she said—

“I ought to have told you that I can give you the names of two English ladies who know me, and would recommend me; they have tried to help me often this winter, but people stay too short a time in Rome to want lessons while they are here.”

“I will write to Miss Camilla as soon as I get home. I am sure she will think no recommendation necessary,” said Mrs. Cooper patronizingly. “Shall I say that you can start as soon as you hear from her?”

“I must wait for money from England; but I will write to my aunt to-day.”

“And now we must tell you whom you are to meet. Are you quite warmly wrapped up, Joanna? Let me fold this plaid a little closer round you. First of all, Miss Heron, there is Mr. Wyncote, Miss Camilla’s nephew, son of a younger brother, and heir to Wyncote; at least, heir, you understand, unless his old uncle, the squire, marries, which is very unlikely.”

"George does not think it unlikely, mamma," said Rose.

"Well, exactly. It was for that reason he took to business, Miss Heron, to the great distress of Miss Camilla. After the news came, she never looked up for at least two days. She said that Wyncotes had spent money, but had never made it ; and that the disgrace would cling to the family for ever. But, notwithstanding this, he is charming, quite charming. Then there is Signor Tiracelli, of the Marchesi Tiracelli, also charming, but poor as a church mouse. He is supposed to be wishing to marry one of the rich Miss Barbers, who are coming, too ; they are quite fabulously rich, I believe."

"And will appear in their latest acquisitions," put in Joanna, "cameos, perhaps ; I saw them at the shop yesterday. Last time we met them it was mosaics, and Fanny Barber had St. Peter's in one ear, and the colosseum in the other, while the Arch of Constantine fastened her collar."

"Here we are," said Rose, as the carriage drove under the ilexes.

"Ah, yes! and there is George waiting for us. Stop, coachman, I mean *cocher*. Oh, Rose, do say the right Italian word;" and Mrs. Cooper waved her parasol in the air in greeting to some one, while Rose coloured with pleasure and bent forward eagerly, as the carriage pulled up sharply.

"This is Mr. Wyncote," whispered Mrs. Cooper to Miss Heron, as he sprang from the ground and came forward to meet them; and Miss Heron turned to look at this charming, quite charming, young man.

Strong, broad shouldered, fair haired—like many other young Englishmen,—looking as if the world were his already, or, if not yet his, to be won by steady perseverance; with no lines on his face but those caused by diligent work; with a free and almost boyish manner, George Wyncote stood, with his hand on the carriage door, greeting Rose and her mother.

"It is so very good of you to come to-

day," said Mrs. Cooper. "Miss Camilla's letter was delightful; and I must introduce Miss Heron. You know she is the daughter of Miss Camilla's old friend. And now let us get out and walk under these delicious trees. Giacomo will take the things on to the place where we dine. How delightful this is,"—she went on, when they had shaken themselves free of the innumerable shawls with which she always encumbered the carriage—"how very delightful—so like dear Wyncote! Don't you see the likeness, George?"

"You must deduct the features of the place, the ilexes and St. Peter's," remarked Joanna.

"A loss for which my aunt Camilla would thank providence," added George, quietly.

"George," said Rose in a low voice, "walk a little slower, and listen to me. Mrs. Wyncote wants a companion, and Miss Heron would like to go."

"Never!" said George, stopping sud-

denly, and letting Mrs. Cooper and Joanna move on. "What, Rose, would you be so brutal as to place any one less strong-minded than Miss Price within the reach of Aunt Camilla's tongue, and power of exasperation?"

"Indeed," said a pleading voice at his elbow, "I should be so happy if Mrs. Wyncote would have me."

"I beg your pardon. I am so sorry. I did not see that you were behind the others," said George, in confusion, and raising his hat; "but really, do you know what you are undertaking? My grandmother is old and exacting; and my aunt is given to good works, and when she is not trying her hand on the schoolchildren will be trying it on you."

"Yes, but we are poor," answered Miss Heron, "very poor. I had better tell you all about it, and then you will see how important it is for me to get a situation as soon as possible. We are too poor to stay in our

rooms in the Piazza di Spagna even one month more. If I go away, papa can live in his studio in the Via Marguta, and if he rests his eyes for even one year, the doctor says that he will see to paint again. Till then I must go away to earn money ; ” and Miss Heron stopped and crimsoned, confused at having been betrayed into this long speech to a stranger.

“ You are talking of being Mrs. Wyncote’s companion,” said Mrs. Cooper, who had waited for them to join her again. “ It will be charming for her, and delightful for Miss Heron. Don’t you think so, George ? I am only so sorry that we are going so soon, and that we shall be of no use as an escort.”

“ It is a pity to leave so soon,” said George. “ You should stay while I am here, and I have taken a fortnight’s holiday.”

“ Oh, yes, mamma, do stay,” said Rose, forgetting her yesterday’s anxiety for English green fields.

"And I should finish Rome," said Joanna.
"Yes, mamma, you must stay. Miss Camilla
will be so very much obliged to you if you
wait for Miss Heron."

"Very well," answered Mrs. Cooper, with
a mournfully resigned countenance, as she
turned away to superintend Giacomo, and to
welcome the Barbers and Signor Tiracelli,
who had just arrived.

"Such a lovely day, Mrs. Barber," she
said, sorrowfully. "What a pity every one
else has failed! And what a beautiful place
this is, Signor Tiracelli; I was just saying
how much it reminded me of England. May
I introduce Mr. Wyncote? And now where
shall we all sit?"

"I think you will be very happy," said
Rose in a low voice, drawing Miss Heron's
arm in hers, "whatever George may say; and
I shall have you so near me that we shall
be able to walk and sketch together. But
please call me Rose; and what is your name?
Miss Heron is so formal."

"My name is Phœbe. I like it because it was my mother's name."

"And I like it too ; it reminds me of hay-making and corn-fields. Let us sit down here ; there is plenty of room on my shawl for us both. How do you do, Miss Barber ? This is my friend, Miss Heron."

The Miss Barbers looked at Phœbe's gown and hat ; and, giving them two chilly bows, seated themselves near to Mr. Wyncote ; the cameos, which Joanna had expected, nodding in their ears.

One young lady assaulted George with a flood of questions, as to how long he had been in Rome—how long he was going to stay—what he had seen and what he was going to see—while the other kept an agonized watch over Signor Tiracelli, whom Joanna was engrossing.

"Can I get to the top of the capitol ?" she was asking, as he helped her to chicken and ham.

"I have no doubt. English ladies do go, certainly. Will you have some salad ?"

"Why, have you never been?" she asked, in a tone of horror, as she extended her plate.

"Ah no! Why should I? I am always here; 'pour moi j'attends.'"

"What foolish questions you do ask, Joanna," remarked her mother. "How few Englishmen have ever been to the top of the monument, for instance."

"But the capitol is different, mamma. Then I ought to see the Guido in San Lorenzo in Lucina," she added, after a long pause, during which she had finished her chicken.

"Is there a Guido there?" asked Signor Tiracelli, languidly cutting a roll. "I dare say; but it is not the church of our family, so I have never been inside."

"Do you see nothing, then?" said Joanna indignantly.

"Why should I, mademoiselle? At present I am gay, I am young, my father is alive, and I live on the first floor, with money for

my gloves and for my flowers ; and I am like a bird. But alas ! my father will die, and I shall then ascend to the second floor, and my brother will reign in his stead ; and then my brother may die, and I shall ascend yet higher to the third floor ; and then I shall begin to see Rome. It will be time then ; for it will be fatiguing to descend and mount again to the fourth and fifth floor when I am no longer young and gay ; so, ‘pour moi j’attends,’ mademoiselle.”

“ What a dreary life ! ” said Mrs. Cooper, shuddering. “ Do not you wish that you were an Englishman ? ”

“ Ah, pardon, madame, what should I do in England ? I was in London once with my friend Calpi ; but I could hardly see for fogs and mists, and I was hungry. I have since understood why you Englishmen eat so much meat.”

“ Is there anything to see here ? ” asked the Miss Barber who had been envying Joanna her companion. “ You must

think of something to amuse us, Signor Tiracelli."

"Let me see," said he, thoughtfully, "there are gardens, certainly."

"But we have gardens in England," she answered discontentedly.

"Ah! and there are caves," he exclaimed, tapping his forehead; "and they go far, far under the earth."

"Let us all see them," said Rose. "How amusing! Come, Phœbe."

"I had rather sit under the trees, thank you, and sketch."

"And I wanted to sketch, too," said Joanna, sadly; "but it is a pity not to see everything there is to be seen, and these caves are down in 'Murray.'"

They had finished luncheon now, and were sauntering under the trees; and at last the sight-seers wandered away, leaving Phœbe Heron in the shade with her open sketch-book in her hand.

She began to look round her for some-

thing to sketch, and then, remembering with a pang of how little use her drawing was now, she shut her book again.

A few months ago each bit of foreground, carefully drawn, had been welcomed by her father to work up into his own large pictures, and now he could not see the book itself when she brought it home. She walked away to the ilexes, and looked towards Rome.

How beautiful everything was here, and to leave it for England—the England at which she had heard Italians shudder, of which she had even heard her father speak bitterly—was very hard.

As she looked over the city, she thought of her life; of eighteen years spent within its walls; of herself, a little child trotting through its streets by her mother's side; of that mother's grave in the English cemetery, under the shade of the old wall; of the months during which she had been her father's only comfort, in the fourth floor of the

house in the Piazza di Spagna ; and of her terror lest his sight should fail, grown now into the haunting sorrow which seemed to hang over her like a black veil.

This was the past and present ; what was the future ? As impossible to know as it would be to guess at the thousands of sorrows buried in that beautiful Rome, upon which she was looking down.

"Have you done your sketch ?" said Rose's voice behind her. "Oh, let me look."

"I have done nothing," answered Phœbe, stooping down to pick up the sketch-book which had fallen to the ground.

"What a pity ! You might just as well have come with us," said Rose, taking the book in her hand and turning over the pages. "But how beautiful these are ! George, come here, and look at these lovely lizards."

"Jolly little things," said George, who was looking over her shoulder.

"Papa liked them," said Phœbe. "He put them into a corner of a picture he was

doing ; 'the last picture he sold,' she added sadly, as they walked to the carriage where Mrs. Cooper and Joanna were standing talking to the Barbers. "No one buys them now."

"How sorry I am ! Why does he not try putting them into the shop windows ? I have seen such lovely ones at Spinola's," said Rose.

"He tried that when we became so poor ; but the last he painted before his eyes grew too weak is still at Spinola's—nobody cares for it."

"We must go now, Miss Heron," said Mrs. Cooper. "I hope you have not been dull. We were so sorry you did not come to the caves ; they seemed very amusing."

"And very wet," said Joanna ; "but we have seen something."

"Good-bye, good-bye," called out Mrs. Cooper, as the Barbers and Signor Tiracelli drove past. "I am so sorry we have no room for you, George."

"I had rather walk, thank you. I shall see you to-morrow," and George stood back under the ilexes to let the carriage pass, smiling at Rose with his old happy careless smile, though his last look was at Phœbe's quiet face.

"What a strange, sad face it is for so young a girl!" he thought, as he lighted a cigar and leaned against a tree, while the carriage disappeared in the distance.

"Well, I think it went off very well," said Mrs. Cooper in a congratulatory voice, when they had reached the town and were trotting through the streets; "only I wish there had been more people."

"It was tiresome of the Grants having a picnic the same day, and carrying off every one. We were lucky to get the Miss Barbers and the cameos," said Joanna.

"There is papa," said Phœbe suddenly, as they reached the Piazza di Spagna. "May I get out here, Mrs. Cooper?" and, as the carriage stopped and Giacomo opened the

door, she added, "If I bring him to speak to you, will you say nothing about the idea of my going to Mrs. Wyncote? I must tell him myself."

"I thought you said he was really blind, Rose," said Mrs. Cooper, as Phœbe went up to a white-haired man, standing before a photograph shop, "and yet he is looking at those pictures as if he saw them."

Rose had no time to answer, for he had already turned to Phœbe with a smile of welcome, and she was leading him to the carriage door. "It was very good of you to ask my Phœbe," he said courteously; "she gets few pleasures."

"We have enjoyed having her immensely," said Mrs. Cooper, "and Miss Wyncote will be delighted to hear of you. Is it long since you saw her?"

"Many years," answered Mr. Heron.

"I thought I should not have forgotten your name if you had been at Wyncote lately; and you will be glad to hear that

she is always the same, always busy, always at work."

"Will you thank her for her remembrance of me?" said the artist quietly, as, raising his hat, he fell back from the carriage door with Phœbe's hand on his arm; and Mrs. Cooper, with a gracious smile, which was quite wasted on the poor blind man, ordered the carriage to turn round and go home.

CHAPTER III.

"How did you get here, papa?" asked Phœbe, as he drew her back to the shop window.

"The maestro brought me across, and said he would fetch me again. I wished to see if it was sold; but it is still there, is it not, Phœbe?"

"Yes, papa."

"I thought I made it out, and the picture which was next it yesterday, of the Contadino, is gone, I think."

"Yes; and another one is in its place of a cardinal, with his footman behind him, by the fountain in the Borghese Gardens."

"Ah, well! that will be gone to-morrow, and mine left. I wish I had kept it at

home, and taken my chance of some one coming."

"We had waited so long, papa."

"Just describe the picture once more before we go, Phœbe; some one who understands real art may see it, and it might be gone by to-morrow."

"It is a grey evening in the Maremma, papa, and a castle in deep shadow is standing against the dim light; there are tall reeds, and a bird is flying away."

"Yes, I remember; as if frightened by the loneliness of the place. This last picture is like me, Phœbe—all life, happiness, and brightness gone, and the one living creature still left is going, as you will go one day, Phœbe."

"Oh, papa! if I do it will be only to help you to get the life and happiness back. Ah, there is the maestro!"

"Good morning, or rather, good evening, signorina," said a brisk, plump-looking Italian, hastening up to them. "I had just

finished my little business, and was on my way to lead the signor back again. Take your last look at your picture, signor; it will be sold to-morrow. If I had only kept my voice, and had become first tenor at the San Carlo, I would have bought it myself; but, alas! my pupils bring in but little money."

"And you are always helping us, maestro," said Phœbe.

"And you will repay it all," he answered gaily. "Indeed," he went on in a low voice, "if the Signor Heron would have introduced a cardinal; no, a cardinal would not have been in keeping, say a contadino, the picture would have been sold directly. Let me give you my arm, signor. And so you have had a charming afternoon, signorina, with the Signora Cooper, and Signor Tiracelli, and a young gentleman from England? Ah, you wonder; but Giovanni Fiammelli knows everything. Here we are at your door, and I relieve you of my presence, to return to-morrow."

"The maestro knows everything," said Mr. Heron, as they climbed the many steps of their staircase.

"I suppose he picks up odds and ends at his lessons," said Phœbe. "I wonder why he will never tell me whom he teaches. And now, papa, I want to talk to you," she went on, as she unlocked the door and went in. "Come and sit in your chair by the window, and listen to me. Now, are you ready, papa?"

"Yes, Phœbe."

She stood at the window, among the flowers she had reared, and the birds who fluttered their wings to greet her, and she looked away over the city. All the noise of voices and clattering of carriages were many feet below her, belonging, as it were, to another world; and her eyes travelled over the domes of churches and roofs of houses, blended together in the blue evening shadow, to the great pile of St. Peter's, rearing itself against the golden sky.

It was a very difficult task she had before her—the task of telling her father that she might be going to leave him for a year. Could she do it? Was it right? What would happen if she stayed?

She had still the birds to sell, worth so much to her, and so little to other people; there were the chairs and beds, and the cross, which would fetch a few francs, and then—why, they would starve. And how could she bear to see him suffer? And if she went he would not be quite alone; the maestro would take care of him, while she would be earning sufficient money to pay for the little studio and buy him all he needed; and in a year she would be back again, and they would be together once more, and he would again look over the glorious city as she was doing now.

“Well, Phœbe?”

“Yes, papa, I was thinking how I should tell you what I am going to do;” and she sank on her knees at his feet, and put her hands in his. “I have told you but little lately

of our poverty, papa, and how for the last week the maestro has had to lend me money to pay our way at all. I have sold all there is to sell, papa, except this gold cross, and the birds, and the little furniture we still have ; and yet, even if you keep quite quiet, and do not use your eyes even as much as you used them to-day, it will be a year, the doctor says, before you see again ; and you must live, papa, and you must get your eyesight back again to see *me*—if it is only to see *me*. But it will be more than that ; you will paint as well as ever again. You know he said that you had only overtired them, and that rest would cure you. So something must be done, papa ; and it is my turn now to take care of you, as you have taken care of me for so many years ; and I am, therefore, going away to England, to be companion to Mrs. Wyncote, if she will have me. I should have forty pounds a year, and the maestro would manage for you till I came back. It is dreadful to go, papa. Don't say that, like the bird

in the picture, the only living thing you have left is going to leave you. It is only like the swallows, to come back again and find you well and strong, coming to meet me with your hands out, and saying, "I can see you, Phœbe, I can see you." What do you say, papa?"

Her voice, which had been hesitating at first, had grown stronger as she had gone on ; but now she broke down altogether, and, bursting into tears, she hid her face on her father's knee.

Still Mr. Heron did not speak, though he had taken one of her hands in his.

"Please speak, papa. Say you understand me; say you do not think I want to leave you."

"I quite understand, Phœbe," he said, at last, gently. "I quite understand, though I wish you were not likely to go to Wyncote. I understand that we should starve if you stay, and that you would starve first; for I should not be able to see that you were

dying before my eyes. Why, my darling, your hand is thin even now; why, Phœbe, you have been starving yourself already."

"Then you are not angry, and I may go."

"Yes, Phœbe; and, if my sight is gone for ever, you will come back that we may die together."

"Don't talk like that, papa. If you cannot do without me I will come back, and we will live together."

And while Phœbe knelt at her father's knees, and talked of the future which might be before her, the evening mist, which had shed its mysterious beauty over the view from her window, had roused George Wyncote from his luxurious idleness under the ilexes at the Pamphili Doria. When the carriage had vanished he had seated himself on the low wall which overlooked the city, and had lighted a cigar.

He was very glad that he had come to Rome. Mrs. Cooper was a bore; but then, Rose was so jolly, and Joanna was fun, and

then there was the beautiful city to look at, and enjoy; such a relief from plodding business.

He was glad, too, that he had seen Phœbe Heron. She was so different from any one he had seen before; and her face, with its large grey sad eyes, seemed always rising before him in the smoke of his cigar, to fade and vanish as it rose higher, only giving place to another and another Phœbe, to rise and disappear also. How miserably poor she and her father must be! He would go and have a look at that picture in Spinola's when he got back to Rome. His cigar was finished now, and he lighted another, and watched another succession of Phœbe's vanish into the deep green leaves.

He would have to call on Mr. Heron, certainly, as he was a friend of his aunt's, and perhaps Phœbe's face might be more cheerful when he saw it next. If she was to haunt his cigars in this way, such would be a desirable change.

But his second cigar was come to an end, and he had no more left. How provoking!

The privation allowed him to feel conscious that a chilly feeling, like that of a wet blanket, was stealing over him ; and then he perceived that a mist was rising, and that it was time to go home.

Slowly he got up from the wall, slowly he shook and stretched himself as Britons do, and slowly he descended the hill.

But, though the cigars were gone, still Phœbe haunted him. He saw the pleading eyes wherever he turned : in the faces of the children as they stopped in their play to look at him ; under the shaggy brows of the patient oxen as they passed by ; beneath the blue veils of the Madonnas bending down over their lamps at the corners of the streets. The poverty he had heard her speak of troubled him, and made him long to help her father and her ; but how could he say to them, "Here is money ; take it ?"

The only way would be to buy the picture ; but then, his lodgings in London were full, and it must go to Wyncote.

Well, he thought there would be no difficulty in that ; he would look at it, and judge ; and if it was a daub he should feel the sacrifice was impossible, and would retire to his hotel, blotting Phœbe's face out with a good dinner.

Here he was in the Piazza di Spagna, and here was Spinola's. He would just look in ; he need not settle about the picture till to-morrow.

There were several paintings for sale in the window. There was a Shepherd Boy, with a brown face and shaggy brown coat, with a bright blue sky and impossible yellow ochre foreground ; there was a Group of Peasants falling on their knees at the first sight of St. Peter's ; and a Cardinal, in scarlet, at the fountain in the Borghese Gardens.

' If Mr. Heron had painted one of these

George felt that his conscience would be at peace, as there was no question as to the reception either would meet with when unpacked at Wyncote.

But in the twilight he could make out another picture, with a grey sky and a grey castle, a very mournful subject, as mournful as Phœbe's face. It was too dark to judge of the merits of any painting; he would merely ask which was Mr. Heron's, and go home. But it was neither the Cardinal in the Borghese Gardens, nor the Crowd of Pilgrims, nor the Shepherd Boy, that was hoisted on an easel for his approval. It was the grey Scene in the Maremma, to which even so demonstrative a Protestant as Miss Camilla could raise no objection.

"An interesting scene," remarked Mr. Spinola, with a shaded lamp in his hand, and his head on one side. "Not, however, one we should recommend the signor to keep as a remembrance of Rome." If he might suggest one of the others in the win-

dow, he was certain either would please the signor better. Poor Signor Heron had made himself no name. He had tried a new style, he had painted for years, and had never raised himself above mediocrity ; and now his day was over, his sight was gone, irretrievably gone. He would never paint again. And he asked fifteen Napoleons for that picture. Now, the painting of the Cardinal was only ten.

Though George was listening quietly, sitting on the corner of a chair, with his arm thrown over the back, yet his British spirit of obstinacy was being gradually roused as Mr. Spinola went on depreciating the English artist, till the Italian, deceived by his immovable countenance, imagined that he had gained the day.

Then the signor preferred the scene in the Borghese ? or perhaps he would rather give an order for an equally well-painted picture of the Holy Father, instead of the Cardinal ? Not that it would be so effective :

the scarlet was all important in a landscape, but that difficulty might be met. And, as he spoke, Mr. Spinola prepared to remove the *Maremma* to its former position in the window.

“Stop! what are you about?” exclaimed George. “Put it back again. I don’t want the Cardinal, nor the Pope. I want this picture. You understand?” he went on, answering Mr. Spinola’s Italian in very loud English, which luckily the latter understood. “Here are the fifteen Napoleons; send them at once to Mr. Heron, and give me his direction. Send the picture across to the *Europa*. Here is my card.”

“What a foolish thing I’ve done,” he said to himself, as he crossed the piazza. “I don’t often throw away money like this. I shouldn’t have done it now, if that man had not bullied me about the Cardinal.”

But he would not have considered his fifteen Napoleons thrown away if he could have seen Phœbe next morning, in the little saloon, four stories above the piazza.

"It is sold—the picture is sold, papa, for fifteen whole Napoleons," she said, or rather sang, as, enlivened by the change of circumstances, she danced up and down in the sunshine on the tips of her toes.

"Who has bought it, Phœbe?" asked her father, eagerly.

"An Englishman, of course, papa; but Mr. Spinola had lost his card. Now I must speak to the padrona about the rooms. We can have them another week;" and Phœbe danced to the door, and down the dark stone staircase, till she reached the first floor, which was the abode of the mistress of the house.

"I can pay for one week more," she said, as, beaten into retreat by the smell of garlic and washing, she was followed on to the staircase by the padrona. "Can you let us stay one week longer when the month is up?"

"Well, it is difficult," said the padrona; "indeed, it is impossible. Such an offer as

I have just had for those rooms of the signor, with such a view of St. Peter's."

"Yes, but they are small and so high up, padrona."

"Ah, there the signorina is wrong. Why, it was only yesterday that when an English milord reached the top, he said, 'Only these few steps!' and wished to go up further. He could not believe it was the fourth floor. My stairs are so very easy."

"Oh, dear!" sighed poor Phœbe, "and I thought you would be so glad to keep us, padrona. You seemed so sorry the other day."

"Well, signorina," said the padrona, coming closer, "if you must have it, I will tell you my real reason. It is not you, signorina, nor the signor; neither—may all the saints forgive me!—has an English milord been to look at your rooms. It is the maestro, Signor Fiammelli, that I am afraid of;" and here the woman's voice sank to a whisper, and she looked cautiously round, only, how-

ever, to leap back to her door, with her hand on her heart as she did so ; for there, a few steps below her, stood the maestro, Giovanni Fiammelli himself.

Phœbe turned too, astonished at the padrona's frightened face, and then began shyly to make her way up the stairs again ; for, looking over the maestro's shoulder, with the sun streaming in with him from the piazzи outside, was George Wyncote.

“Stop, signorina,” said the maestro ; “here is a young English gentleman who has been inquiring for the Signor Heron. I dare say you will be his guide, while I say a word or two to our good friend the padrona. Will you follow the signorina, sir ; she will show you the way. And now, padrona,” he said, laying his hand on her arm with a tight grasp, and waiting till George and Phœbe had turned the corner on their upward journey, “what were you saying to the signorina about me when I came in ? warning her, I suppose, against trusting me, eh ?”

"Oh, Signor Fiammelli! may the holy saints forgive me, if I ever——"

"It is of no use to invoke saints—I happened to hear your conversation; and look here, padrona,"—and here his grasp grew tighter,—“I know a thing or two which will make you hold your tongue. Perhaps you have forgotten the son who is with Garibaldi?”

"Oh, Signor Fiammelli! for the sake of the blessed San Giovanni, your patron saint——" exclaimed the padrona, clasping her hands in real agony.

"Very well," said the maestro, quietly letting her go, and beginning to mount the stairs; "you will remember? and the signorina will have the rooms the extra week she has asked for?"

"Oh, certainly, certainly; how could the Signor Fiammelli think otherwise?" and, white with terror, the padrona backed into her door, while the maestro disappeared round the corner after George and Phœbe.

He mounted the stairs slowly, and very sadly. He had heard Phœbe say "one extra week." What was she going to do then? Going away, perhaps; and his life would be empty and desolate, as it had been before he knew her. It would be as dark as the dreary staircase he was mounting now.

"I am come to look for you, maestro," said her sweet voice from the landing outside her door. "We began to think you were quarrelling with the padrona, and wanted some support. Why doesn't she like you, maestro?"

"She likes me better now, signorina; and will let you stay as long as you like. And how about the picture, signor?" he went on gaily, as he advanced into the room. "I passed Spinola's, and it is gone. Did I not say yesterday 'It will be gone to-morrow'? Alas, why could I not have bought it?"

"I shall miss it from its old place after all," said Mr. Heron, sadly. "I wonder who has got it?"

George, who was standing near the window, made an attempt to speak, but Phœbe's voice stopped him.

"Of course, papa, some one has bought it who understands pictures ; it is not a painting an ignorant man would buy."

"No, Phœbe ; you are right. The uneducated eye would not see half that I meant to suggest."

George was getting very uncomfortable. He ought to have spoken at once, and said that he was the purchaser ; and now, if he revealed the truth, another truth would dawn upon both father and daughter, and they would discover that he had bought it from a wish to help them, and from no love of art. Speaking now would only make them feel that they were under an obligation. There was nothing to be done but to send the picture of the Maremma to his lodgings, and turn out some print to which he was attached.

"It was a foolish thing to hamper myself

with," he thought, as he shook hands with Mr. Heron, and said good-bye to Phœbe; "but I have seen her smile and even laugh, it was worth that."

Otherwise his visit had been a failure, for Phœbe had been so frightened by the padrona that she had hardly spoken as they had mounted the stairs; and, when she had opened the door of the bright, sunny little saloon, and had introduced him to her father, she had retreated to the window. Neither had his conversation with Mr. Heron flourished. George had started the subject of Wyncote and Miss Camilla, but had met with so little encouragement that he had been glad when the queer, fat old Italian, whom they called "maestro," had made his appearance. And, to crown it all, what a foolish coward he had been not to say that he had bought that picture; and he made his way lazily along the sunny street, wondering why he was enjoying his holiday so little, and whether Mrs. Cooper would be

too great a bore if he proposed an expedition to Veii.

"And now, maestro," began Phœbe, when the door had closed on George, "now we must settle our accounts. See how rich we are!"

"Ah! ah!" laughed Fiammelli, as he mopped his face with his pocket-handkerchief, "to think of the signorina remembering those few francs. For myself, I had forgotten them."

"But I have remembered them, and here they are. Don't shake your head. You must take the money, or I shall not be able to ask you to do me a great favour."

"What can I do, signorina?" asked he, eagerly.

"Perhaps I am going away for a year—only for a year, papa," went on Phœbe, laying her hand in her father's, "and I want you to take care of papa till I come back again. He can live in the studio in the Marguta, and you will find some one to cook

for him, and you will be with him all day, maestro, when you are not with your pupils. I shall have a great deal of money to spare, and I shall send it all to you to spend for him ; and at the end of a year he will be well, and I shall come home, and we shall be happy again. Will you do this, maestro ?"

So he was right, and she was going away. How foolish of the birds to sing ! they were her birds. Why did not the song die in their throats, when they heard Phœbe say that she was going away ?

" Well, maestro ?" she asked, anxiously.

" There was no answer wanted, signorina," he said, huskily.

" How good you are, maestro."

" And where are you going, signorina ?" he asked, after a few minutes' silence.

" To England, maestro ; to the grandmother of the Englishman in the light grey coat, who was here just now."

" Why did you say, papa," Phœbe went on, when Fiammelli, who had sat grave and

silent for some minutes, had left the room, "why did you say that you had rather I should not go to Wyncote?"

"I have a superstition about places, Phœbe; and I was unhappy at Wyncote once; but, after all, I shall be easier, knowing the people you are living with. I shall think of you sitting in the old yellow saloon, and walking between the green hedges in the garden."

"And you must never fancy that I am sad, papa. I shall be counting the weeks and days till I see you again, as you will be counting them here." But why do the few days I may have left me here fly like the wind? she said to herself, as, longing for, and yet dreading, its coming, she waited for the answer from England.

Rose sent messages and notes by George, and came herself to beg that Phœbe would join picnics and expeditions; but she only shook her head and said, "We have so few more days together."

So few more days to guide him about the streets, and up to the Pincio. So few more days to sit by his side, with her hand in his, looking over the city to St. Peter's.

Her courage nearly failed her when these few days came to an end ; when letters arrived from Miss Wyncote and her aunt, the one engaging her, and the other sending money for her journey ; and when, for the last time, she saw the sun go down from her window in the Piazz di Spagna.

"Take heart, signorina," said the maestro sadly, as he entered the room, where she was kneeling by her father's side, with his arm round her, and the tears running down her cheeks. "It is only for a year, signorina, only for a year ; and see," he went on, taking a roll of music from his pocket, and spreading his handkerchief on the ground as a carpet for his hat, which he placed carefully upon it, "thinking the signorina's spirits would be low, I have brought the opera in which I was to have taken the part of first

tenor at the San Carlo, if my voice had not given way. If the signorina and the signor will do me the grace to listen, they will see what an effect I should have produced ; my fortune would have been made ;” and the maestro began to moan out the tenor part of a long opera in a shaky, cracked voice.

At first he thought that he could hardly have contrived anything more cheering for Phœbe’s spirits, for she wiped her eyes and smiled ; but by degrees the sadness of the plot of the opera, or the touching way in which he sang it, overpowered her ; for she covered her face with her pocket-handkerchief, and her shoulders shook, apparently with sobs.

“ Poor signorina, it is too much for her,” said he, stopping. “ They always said that there was a ring in one of my notes which touched the heart. I will wait, signorina. I will wait till your return, and then we will have the whole opera ; yes, even if I cough for the whole of the next day.”

"Thank you, maestro," said Phœbe, taking her handkerchief from her eyes, in which there was a suspicious twinkle. "Ah, there's the padrona ; she insists on my drinking some of the Trevi water before I go ; she said she would fetch me ;" and Phœbe, putting a shawl over her head, ran out of the room.

"Well, the signorina looks cheerful," said the padrona, as she joined her, "more cheerful than poor Signor Fiammelli looked on his way upstairs. Ah, poor man ! he will miss the signorina ; but I would not laugh, signorina, nor even smilé : it is a bad omen to laugh at parting. But here we are, signorina. I have great faith in Trevi waters—taking them always brings people safe back to Rome. My sons all drank it before leaving, signorina ; and they will all come back, you'll see," she said defiantly.

"I hope they will, padrona," said Phœbe, as they reached the fountain and looked down on the many streams trickling below them.

"I will go alone, padrona; will you wait for me here?"

"I will have a gossip with a neighbour while you are gone, signorina. She lives just opposite;" and while Phœbe entered the railing and slowly descended the steps, the padrona dived into a doorway, from whence came instantly the sound of a most excited conversation. But as Phœbe went lower, she heard the voices no longer—she heard nothing but the falling of the water. She saw nothing but the grey stone figures, looking lifelike in the moonlight, and she was alone, quite alone, with these strange weird horses and men. She stooped quickly, and dipping her hand into the fountain, drank out of it; and then, half frightened by the stillness, mounted the steps again.

When she reached the top she looked back. Another moment, and she would not have been alone, for some people were descending the steps on the other side, apparently bound on the same errand; and

she could hear their voices, as the padrona joined her, and she turned to go away.

"I am so glad we came," she heard a girl say. "Now I think we shall really have done everything."

"Where is the cup?" asked a man's voice.

"Oh! I have forgotten it; we must drink out of the hollow of my earring;" and then there was a ringing, merry laugh, and Phœbe knew, as she walked up the street again, that she had just missed George, and Joanna, and Rose.

CHAPTER IV.

THE Wyncotes of Wyncote had always, or at least almost always, been great people.

They did not, indeed, claim a seat at King Arthur's Round Table; but the legends of the family asserted that they were of such importance at the time of the battle of Hastings that when the stout Norman baron, to whom William had given the land, came to take possession, he found that in this instance discretion was the better part of valour; and, as there was an heiress, he married her, and took her name.

So the owners of Wyncote were Wyncotes still, and did all that was required of them, or other gentlemen, in those days.

They went to the crusades, and came back to lie carved in stone, with their legs

crossed, in the little church, which nestled under the trees close to the hall they had lived in. They fought for England at Bannockburn and Agincourt; and came gallantly out of the Wars of the Roses, with their avenues cut down, and their house half destroyed, it is true, but with enough money left to rebuild the one, replant the other, and take their place once more as people of importance in the county.

But they had learned wisdom in their troubles, and were more wary in the civil wars; keeping their trees standing, and their plate unmelted, till the sun shone once more.

Since those days they had lived much at home, and had thereby saved their fortunes and pleased themselves; for Wyncote of Wyncote was a great man on his own acres, though a small one at St. James's; and it is pleasanter to be great than small.

But what one man saves another spends, and the park had run a great risk, only very lately, of being shorn of its beauty. The

present Wyncote of Wyncote was a spend-thrift; and the oaks planted in Henry the Seventh's days must have been felled to pay racing debts in those of Queen Victoria, when the horse the squire had run for the Derby, five-and-twenty years ago, had broken down, if his sister had not come to the rescue and saved both her brother's oaks and his credit.

She had sunk the large fortune which she had inherited from an aunt in doing it; but it was to save Wyncote's honour and Wyncote's trees, and surely that was reward sufficient.

Miss Camilla, at any rate, tried to think so to-day, as she walked up and down, under the branches of the oaks, waiting for the return of the carriage sent to fetch Phœbe Heron from the station.

She had hurried through her afternoon's business to be here in time. She had passed the vicarage gate, after a visit to a farm which lay beyond; and though for one moment she had stopped and looked up the

smooth drive which led to the ivy-covered porch, she had refrained from entering, and had left the lecture, which Mary, the house-maid, was to receive for ill-natured gossiping, to be delivered another day.

She had hastened down the village street, with houses on one side, and a grey wall, shaded with elm-trees, where a stile and large gate admitted the public into the walk to the church, on the other; and had hardly given herself time to assure herself that fires were properly lighted, and everything was ready to receive the Coopers, in the red house among the cedars at the entrance of the park, so fearful was she of being late: yet, after all this hurry, she was too soon, and had actually walked five times up and down the short avenue, and still there was no sound of carriage wheels.

She was annoyed with herself to feel how her colour came and went, and how her hands shook when, tired with walking, she stopped at the end of the avenue, and leaned against

a gate in the iron railing which skirted this corner of the park.

As she stood there, she looked over the fields and meadows, which stretched away, mile after mile, in uninterrupted level till they seemed to join the sky, while grey and purple shadows swept across the middle distance, and the afternoon wind bent the tender green corn as [it passed over it, making it rise and fall like the sea when a storm is over.

And as Miss Camilla's eyes followed shadow after shadow, her colour came and went more rapidly than it had done before, and her usual stiff, quiet manner was as flurried as it had been five-and-twenty years ago, when she had looked over the same fields and meadows, and walked under the same trees with Phœbe's father for the last time.

For in sacrificing her fortune she had sacrificed more than money. She had discovered five-and-twenty years ago, just too

late, that the Scotch artist had fallen in love with her, notwithstanding her plain face and awkward figure; and she had discovered that, notwithstanding the difference of their positions in the world, she loved him. It had been like a ray of sunshine breaking into her life, which a moment before had seemed so dreary; and the five-and-twenty years which separated that day from this appeared to vanish, and she stood, as she thought, once more with the sun streaming through the branches over her head, and his voice sounding in her ears.

But the sunshine had lasted only for a moment, and the old pain stabbed her heart as she remembered the words she had said in answer; words which had made him believe that he was rejected on account of his position, because she was too proud to tell him that she had given her money to save Wyncote, and that she was nearly penniless.

She could almost fancy that she heard his steps rustling among the last year's dead

leaves, as he had suddenly turned and left her.

She remembered how her pride had lasted but for a moment; how ready she had been, one second after she had spoken, to go through the world the portionless wife of a poor artist.

She sat down on a root of one of the old trees, where she and her brothers had played in the childish days, which were so long ago that they seemed to belong to some one else, and clasped the hands she had stretched out when she had called Mr. Heron back. If he had only turned and seen her what a happy life hers might have been, though her fortune was gone! But he had not turned to look. He had heard her family pride laughed at by her neighbours, and was angry at having been led on by her manner to believe that the pride did not exist for him; he heard nothing but the crunching of the dry leaves under his feet drowning her faint call; and, all these years afterwards, she was standing

here, an elderly woman, waiting for his daughter.

Neither Mr. Browne, nor the school-mistress, nor any inhabitant of Wyncote, would have recognized Miss Camilla as she stood to-day under the oaks, with a soft, tearful, longing look in the eyes they only imagined capable of finding out the weak places in their harness. But this was the real Camilla; the only Camilla any one would have known —who would have cheered instead of chilled, comforted instead of scolded, guided instead of ruled—if only all had been different, if only the squire's horse in the Derby, five-and-twenty years ago, had won instead of lost.

But she could hear wheels, and she turned away from the gate and walked slowly towards the house.

She wished now that she had gone to the station, and that the meeting with Phœbe was over.

How slowly the coachman was driving! and why was Nancy keeping him waiting at

the lodge ? It was against all orders for the old woman to be doing anything but watch the gate when the carriage was out. Ah ! it was through now, and coming along the park.

Miss Camilla walked faster, and her hands still trembled as she pushed the heavy house-door open under its round archway, and went hurriedly through the stone hall, lined with suits of armour ; and up the wide staircase, hung with portraits of female Wyncotes dressed like blue shepherdesses, and male Wyncotes in pigtails and dove-coloured coats ; and past the gallery, up and down which she, and the squire, and George's father, had run races on rainy days.

The boards on the staircase creaked with age ; and, if she and the squire were young, and her brother Stephen alive again, there were two or three weak places in the floor of the gallery through which their feet would have gone in the first race.

It was all the fault of the horse not winning the Derby five-and-twenty years ago.

Miss Camilla would never allow to herself that Piers could have prevented the ruin in any way. She had always had, and still retained, the strongest belief in him; and if now and then common sense tried to hint that he was imperfect, and that it was owing to his love of self that she was an old maid, and that Stephen had died a disappointed man, that the house was falling to pieces, and the cottages were almost uninhabitable, she would crush the thought as though it were treason. But to-day, as she opened the door of the saloon where her mother was dozing in an arm-chair, past events, of five-and-twenty years ago, crowded into her mind. She could see Piers lean against the marble mantelpiece, and could hear him thank her carelessly for what she had done.

"After all," he had said, "it can make no difference to you, Camilla. You have managed things here for a long time, and you will go on doing so. This can be your home always. I am never likely to marry."

He had settled his faultless tie and white waistcoat as he spoke, and taken a survey of himself in the opposite looking-glass, never seeming to imagine that any one would care to marry her; but as he spoke there was a little shake in his voice which went to her heart, and made her try to believe that there was nothing to forgive.

She could see herself standing by the table in the window a few weeks afterwards, listening to Mrs. Foster, as she complained, with tears of indignation, that the poor Scotch artist, patronized by Miss Wyncote, had married a young niece of her husband's in a most hasty and indecorous manner.

'Yes, how quickly the five-and-twenty years had passed! and how little changed everything was! She was older, and her hair was nearly grey; Mrs. Foster was thinner and more shrivelled; her mother wrapped herself tighter in her shawl, and crept closer to the fire; and Stephen and his wife were dead: otherwise there was no difference, only

George had grown into a man, and she was expecting the arrival of Mr. Heron's daughter as a companion to her mother.

"Is that you making the door creak, Camilla?" asked Mrs. Wyncote, in a querulous tone. "I have been alone all the afternoon, and Fido has had no' walk. Why did you prevent my driving to the station? Fido could have had a little run by the side of the carriage as far as the lodge."

"I thought you would have been tired, mamma; you were quite knocked up after you fetched Piers from the station the last time he was here," answered Camilla, listening to the sound of carriage wheels which were grating now on the gravel drive.

"I wish you would come into the room, Camilla, and not stand there with the door half open. I dare say I should have been tired," she went on, as Camilla shut the door and walked to the fireplace. "It is very provoking being five miles from the station. No one can imagine what made you persuade Piers to refuse his land to the railway."

"Here is Miss Heron, mamma," interrupted Miss Camilla, as her listening ear caught the sound of steps upon the stairs, and the saloon door was thrown open.

What had Miss Camilla expected to see? She hardly knew herself, unless it was a Mr. Heron in woman's attire, with all the extra beauty, with which five-and-twenty years' imagination had painted his face in her memory, reproduced in a feminine type. She had always tried to forget the Mrs. Heron, whom the daughter was as likely as not to resemble; and when a slender girl of eighteen, dusty and crumpled, white and tired with her journey, crept shyly into the room from behind the butler, who pronounced her name with solemn dignity, Miss Camilla was herself again.

"Are you cold?" she asked a little stiffly, for her agitation had left a tremor in her voice which she feared that the butler might detect. "Will you come to the fire? Did Mrs. Cooper and the girls leave you at the

station? This is Mrs. Wyncote. Mamma, here is Miss Heron."

"Ah, yes!" said the old lady slowly, as she settled her spectacles on her nose. "Camilla would not allow me to fetch you from the station. Come here, and let me look at you. Here, closer. No, don't sit on that stool," she went on sharply; "that stool, covered with that little plaid shawl, is Fido's. So you come from Rome. I dare say you have learned sad things there—sad things!—sad things! Put my knitting right for me, Camilla. I have missed a stitch."

Phœbe retreated from Mrs. Wyncote's chair without speaking, as Miss Camilla bent down over the knitting.

She felt dazed and confused, as if the dusty, noisy journey had been a dream; and as if she had crossed, with one step, from the station in the Baths of Diocletian—where her poor, blind father, with his arm in that of the maestro, was standing patiently in the crowd—to this room, hundreds of miles away, with

the crowd, and her father, and the maestro gone, and she alone with strangers.

She stood on the hearthrug, with the fire, and the white marble mantelpiece, carved long ago by some Italian artist, behind her; with a picture, by Sir Godfrey Kneller, of some dark-visaged Wyncote of his time, over her head; and in the silence, only broken by the click of Miss Camilla's needles, looked round the room.

It was very large, and grand enough to take its place in one of the great old Roman palaces: the walls were hung with faded yellow silk; the polished oak floor was nearly black with age, and only covered before the fireplace with a well-worn Turkey carpet; the sofas and chairs were gilt, and angular in their shape, and covered with yellow silk as faded as that upon the walls. Close to Phœbe stood a straight-backed chair, with a tall basket, full of print and calico, on the ground beside it; while, before a sofa, a little further off, was placed a large writing-

table, littered with brown paper and shabby books.

The ceiling was carved, and had been gilt, but the gold had disappeared long ago, and only the carving was left. Heavy silk curtains, which had once been yellow, draped the long row of windows opposite the fireplace, each curtain being held back by faded yellow silk ropes as big as cables, and between the windows stood looking-glasses, reaching from the ceiling to the ground.

There was one just opposite the fireplace, the very one which had reflected Piers Wyncote five-and-twenty years ago, when he had surveyed himself, and had settled his white waistcoat.

It was now reflecting Phœbe, in her little black bonnet and shabby black gown; and, as she saw herself standing alone in this large room, a sudden sense of her utter forlornness rushed over her, swept away the self-control which had made her bid her father a cheerful good-bye, and which had prevented her

breaking down through the long journey, and she burst into tears.

"How very tiresome, Camilla," exclaimed Mrs. Wyncote, looking up in a nervous manner. "Miss Price never did this. When I said she might come, though she was so young. I never thought she would cry. Poor Fido! How he trembles! How she has frightened him!"

"Miss Heron is tired, mamma," answered Miss Camilla, rising, and laying down the knitting, while all tenderness disappeared from her voice—for she hated and despised tears; and, as she opened a door opposite to the one by which Phœbe had entered, and led her across a passage floored with oak, and hung with the gloomiest pictures in the house, to the long, low, wainscoted room she had prepared for her, she made up her mind that the girl was a poor, spiritless, hysterical thing, most likely taking after the mother she had till now ignored.

"I am so sorry, Miss Wyncote," said

Phœbe, stopping her tears with a great effort.

"I dare say you are tired," answered Miss Camilla, as she walked to the window and looked out. "You will find books suitable for you to read in that book-shelf. I see your box is come up." And then she added, after a moment's pause, "Did you leave Mr. Heron better?"

"He is very blind," said Phœbe, keeping back fresh tears as she thought of him sitting alone in the studio in the Via Marguta; "but they say he will be well in a year," she went on, more to reassure herself than from any expectation of interesting Miss Camilla, who seemed engrossed with the view from the window.

"You will come to the saloon when you are ready," she said, as she turned to go, and Phœbe was left to dry her eyes, unpack her box, and study the room which was to be her home for a year.

There was a small white dimity bed in

one corner, a tall chimneypiece on one side ; the walls were painted drab, and adorned with neutral-tinted pictures of scenes in the life of Alexander, and of maidens, in airy costumes, crowning busts of Bacchus.

There was not much to distract Phœbe's attention from her unpacking ; and, afraid lest Miss Camilla should think her idle, she unlocked her box, and arranged her scanty wardrobe in the mahogany chest of drawers provided for her.

It was soon done ; she shut her box and pushed it on one side, and then walked to the open lattice window and looked out ; no longer over roofs of houses away to blue St. Peter's, but on flower-beds and grass not very carefully kept, for the payment of Mr. Wyncote's debts left little money for gardeners' wages ; on shady, moss-grown walks and alleys, in which old Wyncotes, in ruffs and farthingales, had made love ; and on a wide terrace, with a grey stone balustrade, along which another generation had swept

in brocade and hoops—a terrace untenanted now, except by two peacocks, who spread their tails and marched up and down, sunning themselves in the evening sun.

"It is beautiful, but very sad-looking," sighed Phœbe, as she moved away and opened the door into the passage. "I don't wonder that papa was unhappy here."

There was no possibility of lingering, for Miss Camilla would hear her footstep on the boards of the uncarpeted passage; so she took courage and opened the door into the saloon. Mrs. Wyncote was dozing in her chair, with Fido on his stool near her, and her knitting in her lap, while Miss Camilla was seated at the writing-table, covering the shabby books with the brown paper.

As Phœbe appeared she looked up, and greeted her with what, on her face, was almost a smile; for, while writing numbers and titles on the brown backs of the books, a sudden idea had struck her, which she had instantly petrified into intention—the idea of doing her

best for Phœbe, notwithstanding her tears, by marrying her to the very man these books had been bought to annoy.

After all, there was no harm in Mr. Browne. He was High Church, certainly; but if once he was married to Phœbe she felt confident that she could insist on Ryle's tracts, and other books of the same nature as those she was numbering, gaining undivided rule in the parish.

Besides providing a pleasant home and a good husband for Phœbe, she would also destroy the only force antagonistic to her own that in her day had ever raised its head in Wyncote. Mr. Heron could come back from Italy and live a happy life with his daughter : and she shut the last book with a determined tap as she got up to ring for tea ; and, while she smiled at Phœbe, she was arranging the shape of the beds she should cut on the vicarage lawn, and the creepers she would plant by her *protégée's* drawing-room window.

CHAPTER V.

MISS CAMILLA began laying her plan of operations before bed time, and finished arranging them in the hours of the night. Phœbe must be treated differently from former companions. She must not be allowed to have her Sunday mornings to herself, and to wander about as suited her. She must begin instantly a course of education to fit her for becoming Mr. Browne's wife, and filling that post as perfectly as any *protégée* of Miss Camilla's must undoubtedly do.

Of course she had everything to learn; so the housemaid, when she opened Miss Camilla's shutters, received orders to rouse Phœbe, and tell her that breakfast would be ready at half-past eight; and when poor Phœbe appeared in the little breakfast-room,

hung with tapestry, at the foot of the big stairs, she found Miss Camilla, seated in her bonnet and jacket, pouring out tea, with some little black books by her side on the table.

“I was sure, my dear, you would wish to start at once, and help me in any good work that was going on, so I had you called early; and, if you will eat your breakfast, we will set off at once to the school. I dare say you will like to listen to my teaching to-day in preparation for a class next Sunday;” and Miss Camilla patted the little black books as she spoke. “Rose and Joanna are sure to be there,” she continued, “and Mrs. Foster, the doctor’s wife, who is, I believe, a kind of connection of yours. There is no work so interesting as Sunday-school teaching, and you will possibly find it most useful in your future life.”

“But it could be of no use in Rome,” said poor Phœbe, with a little sigh and a suppressed yawn; for if she had been allowed to

sleep till one o'clock, she was so tired with her journey that she would still have yawned.

"Your life may not be spent in Rome ; at any rate, while you are here you must learn Protestant ways. I fear that you may have imbibed much error from living so near to the fountain-head of Papacy ;" and Miss Camilla sighed.

"I always went to the English church," said Phoebe, looking hungrily at the loaf.

"I am glad to hear that Mr. Heron has not forgotten his English habits."

"Oh, papa never went," answered Phœbe ; "it was mamma who used to take me."

Miss Camilla drew herself up at the mention of Mrs. Heron's name, and finished her breakfast silently, while she ran a pencil down the first page of each little black book, dotting down the absent children of the previous Sunday on a piece of paper.

Phœbe ate her bread-and-butter and the eggs provided for her, and her spirits began to return as her hunger abated. After all,

it was worth while getting up before she was rested, to see Rose; and any occupation which made the day pass, and shortened the time between each letter from Rome, was an advantage; so, when Miss Camilla snapped the clasp of a leather bag sharply upon the little black books and prepared to depart, Phœbe went upstairs and fetched her bonnet, which was hardly shabbier than Miss Camilla's, that she might be ready to depart too.

"How long are the children in school on Sundays?" she asked timidly, when the great clock over the stables struck nine, just as the door creaked on its hinges to let them out of the cold hall into the bright spring sunshine.

"From a quarter-past nine till eleven o'clock," answered Miss Camilla decisively. "There has been an effort made by some one in the parish to shorten the time by a quarter of an hour, but I have set my face most firmly against any innovation." The

day before she would not have hesitated to say that Mr. Browne, the vicar, was the delinquent, but to-day she did not mention his name. Phœbe must not be prejudiced against him on any account whatever.

She need not have restrained herself, for Phœbe would hardly have heard her, she was so engrossed by the beauty of everything around her. The tender green of the beech-trees, meeting over her head like the aisle of a great cathedral; the birds singing in the branches; the fresh grass springing under her feet; the squirrels darting up the great grey trunks; the pheasants strutting like kings in their bright plumage, made a picture such as she had hardly dreamed of.

She thought of last year's summer, and understood now how her poor dying mother had gasped for a breath of English air in the stifling Roman heat—how she had longed for one more sight of English beauty.

Miss Camilla led Phœbe down the beech-tree avenue, and through a shrubbery, to a

door in an old brick wall. She produced a key from her bag, and ushered her, not into the school, as she had expected, but into a long strip of garden, full of gillyflowers and pansies, with a high wall covered with currant bushes on one side, and on the other a set of old-fashioned cottages, built of red brick, which had been toned to a subdued colour by the hand of Time.

There was a higher house in the middle of the row of cottages, over the door of which was an inscription, stating that Miss Barbara Wyncote, in the year 1702, had founded this school for the education of the girls of the parish. Above the inscription was an old sundial, stretching out its iron arm to point the hours which fled away solemnly and silently. There was no loud tick to mark the moments, no hammer to mark the half-hours and hours of the withering lives in the almshouses below. The iron arm had pointed silently to nine o'clock on every sunny day as each girl in Wyncote, since

the year 1702, had begun her schooling ; . and its shadow had marched on round and round ever since, while the children grew to be women, and left, to return to the old enclosure no more till they did so worn and wearied out with the sorrows of life, and then it once more marked their days solemnly, till they were borne away to the churchyard, to rest under the walnut-trees.

The dwellers in the almshouses, attracted by the click of the little gate, appeared at the doors as Miss Camilla and Phœbe entered the garden ; and each old woman had a clean white cap on her head, bound round with broad black ribbon, and was clothed in a neat brown gown, with a bright little shawl on her shoulders.

They stood at their doors, curtseying, and “Good-day to you, Miss Camilla. Good-day to you, Miss,” followed each curtsey ; said, too, with great affection and interest, for was not Miss Camilla their queen and protectress, the bulwark against empty coalsheds in

winter, the arbitrator in every quarrel all the year round, the hand which dealt out soup and gruel in illness? and, though her words might be sharp and her manner dictatorial, they had been dictated to by her from the time she had worn pinafores, and were content. It was only the younger generation, whose bonnets were shorn of their flowers, and whose curls were cut close to the head, who ventured to whisper that England was a free country, and Miss Camilla was a tyrant.

So the generation that was passing away asked dutifully after each member of the Wyncote family, and remarked that winter seemed to be over, but that their rheumatism was not, and that they were thinking of getting ready for church; some of them hoping that Miss Camilla would excuse their going, out of respect for their ailments. But Miss Camilla considered that it was part of the whole duty of widows in almshouses to sit, in a neat row, on the oak seat in church, which skirted the great Wyncote pew.

So, answering that the day was fine and that the sun would cure their rheumatism, she passed on with Phœbe to the front of the school-house, where, in deep and apparently angry conversation, stood the vicar of the parish, and a lady with rather a sharp nose, whose clothes were made after the fashion of Miss Wyncote's.

“It is most improper, Mr. Browne, to intrude business on a Sabbath morning; it is a sign of the irreligion of the government under which we live that such a thing as a post on the Sabbath-day should be possible,” this lady was saying. “Miss Camilla will agree with me, I am sure; without mentioning the impertinence of supposing that a school, founded by a member of the family, and enlarged for boys, and kept up by the munificence of other members, and which has served the purpose of teaching the parish for more than a hundred and fifty years, should be pronounced incompetent. But I leave you to Miss Camilla. Is this my dear young

relative?" and she turned from Mr. Browne to embrace Phœbe, whom she folded in her shabby arms.

"A brand snatched from the burning," she said, sighing. "Poor child, poor child!" how like you are to your poor, unhappy, misguided mother, whose death I only heard of a month ago! How happy your Aunt Frances and I feel that you are placed, so providentially, under the guidance of my truly Christian friend, Miss Wyncote."

Phœbe was too much overpowered to answer; she only made out that her mother was called misguided, and she shrank from Mrs. Foster's encircling arms, and drew herself up proudly.

"You have been warned against me, I see," said Mrs. Foster, shaking her head; "but I will be patient; and, as I have promised your Aunt Frances, I will be faithful, I will keep a watchful eye upon you, and grudge no words of warning. The fact of your leaving a city the seat of so much error gives me hope."

"I am going back to Rome in a year, and I only leave papa to earn money to enable him to live," exclaimed Phœbe indignantly, as she turned away with a lump in her throat to listen to Miss Camilla's conversation with Mr. Browne.

"You see, Miss Wyncote," he was saying, "I hardly know what to do. We need help, we want pupil-teachers; and can you tell me how they are to be paid? Government insists on more ventilation, and also on boarded floors. If Mr. Wyncote could be persuaded to help us rather largely, we might get on; but I have not seen him for so long. Do you think he will be down soon?"

"Not at present, I believe," answered Miss Camilla stiffly, as she raised her head and looked at the sundial, whose sharp shadow lay across the quarter. "It seems to me that what has hitherto worked so well may, with good management, go on working, were it not for this love of change which seems infecting every one. It is time for

school, I perceive. Boarded floors," she went on, as she walked into the schoolroom and took her place before an empty set of forms, "and ventilation! Are they better than their forefathers, that they may not stand upon stone, or weaker, that they need more air to breathe? And, as for pupil-teachers, Mrs. Wright has made no complaints to me, whatever she may have done to others, and we can go on as we are."

"That will be quite impossible," said the vicar, with decision. "We are already behind all the schools in the county, and the younger children make no progress at all;" and then, with indignation in both their hearts, the vicar and the lady of the parish attended to the children, who began to stream in, and welcomed Rose and Joanna, who appeared last of all.

"Are you very tired, dear Phœbe?" asked Rose.

"Are we not very good to have come?" asked Joanna. "Mamma was dreadfully

afraid of our vexing Miss Camilla ; but I should never have done it except that I wanted to ask her if some news I have heard is true."

"Mrs. Foster and I have taken your classes into ours while you have been away, Rose," said Miss Wyncote ; "but here they are re-arranged again. Will you inquire why all these children were absent last Sunday, Joanna ? Will you sit by me, Miss Heron ?" And at once voices were hushed, the children and teachers fell into their places, and Phœbe sat and listened to Miss Camilla's words till she was tired, and then she looked round the school instead.

It was a long, low building, with a lack of ventilation which had alarmed the inspector ; with a fireplace and a chimney-piece, on which stood an old clock which had ticked through the school lives of several generations of children, while a lithographed portrait of a young man, with a pleasant face but a self-sufficient mouth, hung over it.

The portrait was of Piers Wyncote when he came of age, after a long minority; when he was inheriting ready-money enough to make him the richest man in the county; when he had the whole world before him; when his portrait had been taken and lithographs given to each tenant, who framed them in black frames, hung them on their walls, and looked at them with pride as the picture of a man who, according to his own birthday speech, was to be the best landlord Wyncote had ever known.

The portraits still hung in the little parlours throughout the place, but the smoke and flies had crept in and spoiled them, as much as selfishness and waste had crept in and spoiled the real man. No tenant now pointed to them with pride; few spoke of the original with respect, none with love: the only exceptions were Miss Camilla and the portrait in the old-fashioned school, where no fly was allowed to creep behind the frame, where the glass was periodically taken out

and washed free from smoke, and where, consequently, the features of young Piers Wyncote shone out as fresh as on the twenty-first birthday, so many years ago. Phœbe wondered who the young man was, and then she looked up at the unceiled roof, and down again on the different classes.

Her cheek flushed as she studied Mrs. Foster, whose scholars were apparently exhausted and thinking of going to sleep; and she passed on to Mr. Browne, whose boys were listening attentively as he described some foreign country; and lastly, her examination came to an end as her eyes fell on Rose and Joanna, the sight of whom carried her away over the mountains and sea to Rome, and to the little studio where her father must be sitting, where the orange-trees trailed their branches on the balustrade of the steps outside the door, and the cypress peeped over the wall out of some one else's garden. She was recalled to England by Miss Camilla's voice ceasing, and a sudden

flutter of leaves, as each child closed its Bible and settled itself preparatory to going to church.

“I hope you have taken a lesson for next Sunday,” said Miss Camilla, who, without waiting for an answer, called over the names, shut the clasp of her bag once more on her little black book, and rose to depart.

“Miss Camilla, will you tell me——?” began Joanna, as the children poured out of school and assembled outside the door. But Miss Camilla was so busy marshalling them that she did not hear, and Joanna had to fall back to the head of her own class. Then the march began, the girls leading the way, in green-and-white straw bonnets, tied under their chins with strips of green glazed calico, and in white tippets and green frocks,—for green and white were the Wyncote colours, and had been ordained by Miss Barbara, a century and a half ago, to be worn for ever by the girls in the school she had founded. Miss Camilla walked by the elder girls with

Phœbe at her side. She passed out of the strip of garden through a gate into the village beyond, and led them, under the long row of tall elm-trees which shaded the cottages on the opposite side, to an open gate in the wall which led into the shrubbery.

Poor Miss Camilla sighed. The vicar's remark that the school was the worst in the county rankled in her breast; and, though she would have died sooner than allow that such could be the case, she was too sensible not to know that it was true.

And all for the want of money. How much could be done with money. Why could not George find a rich wife and bring her to live at Wyncote? So that he was not asked to do it himself, Piers would have no objection to his heir mending the cottages, draining the ponds, and improving the school. But then George was so difficult to manage. He had gone his own way from the time he first had worn jackets and trousers. He had mapped out his own career; not becoming

a soldier or a lawyer, as a gentleman and a Wyncote should, but actually a merchant; and he would most likely thwart every project for a rich marriage by engaging himself to some penniless girl, or, what would be nearly as bad, to Rose, with only three or four hundred a year, which would be swamped in the poverty of the estate. There seemed to be no hope for poor Wyncote; and Miss Camilla sighed again.

"Miss Camilla," said Joanna, "may I walk by you in front? the laurels are wet, and the children push me into them. And then I want to ask you about the Mill' House. Is it true that some Liverpool merchant has taken it?"

"The Mill House," gasped Miss Wyncote, in astonishment at Joanna's audacity, and also at her question. "No one has taken it: it is still unlet."

"But I am sure it is going to be let, though," went on Joanna calmly, "for Maple told me so when I was dressing this morning,

and the coachman told her, and the gardener at the Mill House told the coachman. Maple says he is worth millions, and has only one daughter, and no son. But I must let Rose know that you can tell me nothing more."

"I beg you will not talk of the affairs of the estate before the school-children, Joanna," said Miss Camilla, trying to speak quietly. "Also I shall speak to your mother about your habits of gossiping, which are evidently not improved by your absence from home. I beg now that you will return to your post; we are in the park, and there are no laurels to wet you;" and Miss Camilla walked on at a rapid pace, the school-children following her at a sharp trot.

Phœbe looked at her as she tried to keep up, and wondered whether it was Joanna's manner or her words which had upset her. Joanna certainly needed repressing; but as apparently she had never owned to any fear of Miss Wyncote, there could be no novelty

in her way of speaking, and, if it was not that, why should the letting of a house displease Miss Camilla to this degree?

She was very glad when the pace at which they were going abated, and she saw that they were close to the Hall, and had reached an old lichgate, through which the path led up to a church shaded with walnut-trees.

The walls of the church were old and grey, with a Norman door, lancet windows, and a perpendicular tower, the whole having been built by different generations of Wyn-cotes, either as votive offerings, or from anxiety for monkish or worldly praise. The buttresses and windows were shrouded with ivy, and moss-covered tombstones filled the churchyard. The children, in green and white, were passing into the church under the deep porch, through the open sides of which the shining sun was streaming on their bonnets and capes. Rose, Joanna, and Mrs. Foster were following them, and Mr. Browne closed the procession.

But Miss Camilla stood under the walnut-tree, evidently forgetting Phœbe's presence, till the chimes changed to a toll, and then she started and led the way into church, and up the aisle to a curtained pew within the chancel.

Phœbe stared at the green baize door into which she was ushered by the old butler from the Hall, who closed the door upon them, and left them both invisible to the eyes of the less fortunate parishioners with only open seats. For the Wyncote pew was the only one left of its kind in all the country round. When Mr. Browne had urged reseating the church he had carried his point with all except Miss Camilla. Even Mrs. Foster had been forced to give way, as her husband sided with the vicar; but Piers Wyncote was lay rector, the chancel was his, and his sister insisted on his refusing to comply with any proposition to sweep away his right of shutting himself off from the eyes of men if ever he went to church.

For herself she preferred publicity; and, having asserted her family rights, she to-day, as usual, boldly undrew the green curtain, and standing up, so that her head and shoulders appeared above the woodwork, looked with a sharp glance round the church.

The widows were creeping in one by one, and taking their seats according to seniority on the oak bench in the nave, which approached closest to the great pew. Each father or mother of a family present was marked down approvingly in Miss Camilla's mind—each absent one recorded for blame, as they sat divided from each other in the men and women's seats.

The school-children busily found the place in their Prayer-books. The organist (Miss Camilla remembered the old grinder with a pang) dashed into a voluntary, and she subsided once more on to the green baize cushions, for service had begun.

Even under Miss Camilla's eyes Phœbe could not prevent hers from wandering round

this first specimen of an English church she had ever seen. Opposite to her, on the wall, was a monument surmounted by fat cherubs, holding in their hands a gigantic scroll, on which were inscribed the virtues and good deeds of Mrs. Barbara Wyncote, in the year 1702. There were prostrate figures of old crusading Wyncotes, with their crest, a lion couchant, at their feet, and crosses on their breasts, to distract her attention when she stood up; and niches in the nave, under which slept, carved in stone, the ladies in ruffs and farthingales, who had in their lives sauntered on the terrace outside the hall, and now lay silent with their stone sons and daughters kneeling at their feet. There were monstrosities of the Georgian era, such as white marble weeping willows and veiled urns on black marble backgrounds; and lastly, a plain white tablet—which Phœbe studied during the sermon, in a vain effort to keep open her sleepy eyes—which bore only the name of Stephen Wyncote, described

as having been cut off in the beginning of a great career, and of Anna his wife.

"I wish, for your sake, far more than for my own, dear Phœbe," said Mrs. Foster, when they were standing again in the church-yard, "that Mr. Browne's sermons contained wheat instead of chaff."

"I liked Mr. Browne's sermon to-day," remarked Miss Wyncote sharply, as she turned from the bows and curtseys which greeted her as she came down the path; "and I thought that Miss Heron might have profited by many of his remarks, instead of going to sleep."

"Please call her Phœbe, Miss Camilla," said Rose; "she can never feel at home unless you do, and she is so tired. I don't know how ever I kept awake."

"I slept, like Phœbe," said Joanna.

"I am very sorry," said Phœbe; "but the pew was so high I could not help it."

"A high pew!" exclaimed Mrs. Foster indignantly, smarting under the feeling that

Miss Wyncote had not supported her properly in her remarks on the sermon ; " what a privilege to be able to withdraw yourself from the eyes of men ! "

" Yes, if you want to go to sleep," said Joanna.

" I suppose Mrs. Cooper will be at church this afternoon," said Miss Camilla, as she turned away and led Phœbe across the churchyard, under the walnut-trees, to a gravel walk, between some old yews, which brought them in a few steps to the front of the house

She had tried to keep her thoughts from wandering during church time to what had disturbed her before ; but now the uneasiness returned, and she wondered if there was any truth in Joanna's words. If there was truth, the matter was incomprehensible : it would be the first time since he had come of age that Piers had taken any steps in managing affairs without consulting her.

If he had allowed matters to go so far

without telling her that there was a tenant for the Mill House, it was a sign that her power over the place, which she considered, since she had sacrificed her fortune, as her own almost as much as her brother's, was in jeopardy. And Camilla loved power; it had taken the place of husband, of children, and of all love except love of Piers and of Wyncote. It was the love of power which made her tremble, as she stepped from under the yew-trees, at the chance of Piers having taken the management of the estate in his own hands. But her thoughts were turned in another direction as she and Phœbe passed the Tudor arch, which led to the stables, and crossed the gravel sweep up to the Hall door.

There were signs of wheels, fresh wheels; and a carriage coming to Wyncote Hall on a Sunday was a crime which had never been committed in Miss Camilla's time. Her bosom swelled, and her eyes flashed as she opened the door, and led the way up the creaking stairs. She must instantly ring the

saloon bell and find out what could have caused such an infringement of her rules. But there was no occasion to ring the bell; for, before the fire, leaning against the marble mantelpiece, surveying himself calmly in the opposite looking-glass, stood the transgressor himself, Piers Wyncote of Wyncote.

CHAPTER VI.

THE squire of Wyncote was what is called a good fellow. He had been a good fellow at Eton, a good fellow at Christ Church, the best of fellows in the 4th Light Dragoons, and, when habits of the turf and a dislike to the small modicum of control with which regimental life hampered him transferred him to Newmarket and liberty, he was once more treated as the best of fellows. Society in London soon welcomed him in all its most select sets, and his life thenceforward was apparently unmixed with a single care. He had what is called sown his wild oats; that is to say, about the time when he sold out of the army, he had had losses on the turf which rendered it absolutely necessary to shut up Wyncote, and abdicate much inter-

ference with its affairs. But he still clung to the name of squire ; he still kept, as he expressed it, the reins in his own hands, and occasionally swept down on his ancestral acres to strengthen Camilla in any parochial dispute.

When he came he was welcomed like the prodigal son ; as many a son who has never gone astray would like to be welcomed. His mother laid aside her knitting and listened breathlessly to his London gossip. Camilla hung upon his words, hid the brown-covered books which offended his correct taste, and tried to keep off any village subject which might annoy him, however near her heart it might lie. She sighed at his departure, never tried to keep him beyond two days, and never reminded him that he owed her anything.

During his whole life he had never been known, but once, to be what his friends called nonplussed ; and that was on his brother's death.

His brother was not a good fellow, nor a *bon enfant*: he was a good, studious, careful man. His prizes at Eton, and his double-first class at Oxford, showed what his capacity was. His success at the union had induced his friends to get him into Parliament; and though a lucrative career seemed opening for him at the bar, he preferred to try political life.

He had already been successful in his *début* in the House when what the squire called "*his* misfortunes" took place; that is, his gambling debts prevented him from paying his brother's election expenses, and thereby forced him to retire from Parliament, just as he was beginning an honourable career.

He had married a wife rich enough to allow him to live quietly; and he was just on the point of receiving some reward for his labours, in the shape of a permanent place in the Colonial Office, when he died, at the age of thirty-two, partly from overwork, and partly from disappointed hopes and bitter

regret at the fate of Wyncote and his brother.

Then just for a short time the squire was in bitter sorrow. He buried himself at Wyncote with his mother and sister for more than a month. His grief seemed to be a matter of more importance than that of the poor widow. He was recommended to travel, and he went to America, where he was once more found, as his spirits returned, to be the best fellow in the world.

He crossed the Rocky Mountains long before doing so became an every-day affair; he bore all physical discomforts with equanimity; his courage and endurance lasted longer than that of all his companions. When *they* were nearly starved the most nauseous food suited *him* as well as a dinner at the Café de Paris; and at the last, when they arrived at San Francisco, he was the only one of the party of whom nobody had a bad word to say.

And now he was the life of London dinner parties. No anxiety was felt by the hostess if only Mr. Wyncote had been secured. He was enthusiastically received in country houses, and reverentially placed by the keepers at the best corners—a reverence which was partly owing to his never missing a bird, and partly to the royal tips given at the end by this moneyless man.

In short, London and the country said that Wyncote of Wyncote was “no man’s enemy except his own.” How could they tell that? How could they know what wrongs his reckless selfishness had committed in his own home? Not to speak of the dead brother, whose life he had ruined, the sister he had made penniless, were there not men, women, and children lying buried in the little churchyard, close to his gate, killed by the fever which lurked in the ponds the squire was too hard up to drain, and in the walls of the houses he was too poor a man to rebuild? If all those to whom he had been a greater

enemy than he had been to himself could have been marshalled before him, like the spectres in Macbeth, perhaps even the squire would have shrunk back in dismay ; but, as it was, he never allowed disagreeable affairs to trouble him,—he received them all with the imperturbable calmness with which he received Camilla this Sunday morning, when, astonishment struggling in her face with the indignation produced by the marks of the carriage wheels, she stood at the saloon door with Phœbe behind her.

“ How do you do, Camilla ? ” he said, with a languid smile, as he slowly sank from his position before the fire into a comfortable yellow silk arm-chair, and stretched out his legs clothed in admirably-cut trousers.

“ Only think, Piers is come ! ” put in the old lady, her head shaking with excitement. “ And on Sunday, too, when I have no papers and no knitting ! ”

“ I am very glad to see you, Piers,” said Miss Camilla, advancing into the room, her

voice a little unsteady with her agitation; for it had been easier for her to give up a fortune than to bear an infringement of her rules, even when the transgressor was Piers.

"I should have written," went on Mr. Wyncote calmly, "only knowing that you never get your letters on Sunday—I beg your pardon, Miss Price," he said, suddenly rising to his feet again, and making Phœbe such a low bow that she disappeared, crimson with shyness, through the opposite door, and took refuge in her own room.

"Miss Price is gone," said Camilla; "this is Miss Heron."

"Surely I remember the name Heron—Heron. Whom do I know called Heron? Oh! I remember now," and Mr. Wyncote settled himself comfortably once more against the marble mantelpiece, "a Scotch artist who was here many years ago. What a faculty I have for remembering names! Any relation?"

"His daughter," said Camilla quietly. "So you could not come yesterday, Piers."

"No; I was obliged to dine with Lord Wargrave, and, not being able to write, have had to drive five miles in a rickety fly instead of having the carriage."

The carriage on a Sunday! Miss Camilla was obliged to untie her bonnet strings to breathe freely. What were things coming to? To have had Perkins, the coachman, absent from his place in church, fetching a master whom she was always endeavouring to believe herself, and make the village believe, was all a squire should be, from a train on a Sunday, what a scandal it would have been! But her mother's voice broke in as Mr. Wyncote ended—

"Yes! five miles. It is what I am always saying, Piers. How Camilla could insist on not allowing the line to run through the estate is incomprehensible to me. I got no drive yesterday, and Fido had to stay at home."

"I ought to have listened to Wargrave," said the squire, brushing a speck of dust from his boots. "Women never understand business."

"Is that why you have not told me that you have let the Mill House?" said Camilla, snapping and unsnapping her little bag to conceal the trembling of her hands.

"What a horrid noise that bag makes!" answered the squire. "Yes; I have let the Mill House, and to a friend of Wargrave's; had I not told you?"

"No; I heard it, by chance, to-day," said Miss Camilla. "I was told it was a merchant."

"He is the richest in Liverpool. I believe it is satisfactory in every way. He has no wife, and an only daughter."

"And is worth a million?"

"Well, so the world says; but a million is a large sum. I wish, Camilla, that you could find some other device for covering village books than brown paper; or, if the brown paper is *de rigueur*, that you would keep your library downstairs."

Camilla took the offending books in her hand, and left the saloon. Surely a change

was coming; Piers was beginning to need her no longer. As she went down the broad oak passage, and looked up at the faded portraits, where sometimes all trace of a face was gone, she wondered if those old Wyncotes had ever been as lonely as she was; if any of them had given everything up for a brother; and what they had felt when he began to fail them. What a few short years it seemed since she and Piers and Stephen had played at hide-and-seek in and out of these old nooks and corners! How short life was!

Phœbe heard her step as she passed her door, and raised her head to listen, only to stoop it again over some cards, on which she was painting the days of the week in illuminated letters. "Sunday, Monday," she said to herself. "Sunday, the day when the maestro promised I should always hear from him. I shall put the cards one behind another, and change them every morning; when I see Saturday I shall know that my letter is near. I shall have to see that

Saturday fifty-two times," she said, sadly.
"How long life is!"

The squire was charming at luncheon. Phœbe had never seen any one so pleasant. Mrs. Wyncote was awake, and Miss Camilla had by this time entirely persuaded herself that she had been mistaken in thinking that her brother wished to put her aside. She had even schooled herself to forgive the Sunday travelling; and the idea that she had misjudged him softened her voice and manner when she asked him to come to afternoon church, as they stood again in the saloon.

"I was going to walk to the Mill House," he answered, a little shortly.

"But that will do to-morrow, Piers. Mamma will be going this lovely day, and this is the first time for so many years that you have been here on a Sunday."

Her words "for so many years" touched the only soft chord in the squire's heart. Camilla meant the time that Stephen died; the only time that the squire's selfishness had

come home to him, and a fleeting intention of turning over a new leaf had flickered through his mind ; and with a little sigh, a sigh perhaps that the new leaf had not been turned, he said, " I will go."

It was more than Camilla had expected or hoped for. Perhaps he was really coming home to give up idle habits, and spend the little he had left upon his people.

How briskly she taught her class that afternoon ! The children listened, and as Phœbe listened too she felt the goodness of this cold, energetic woman. Miss Camilla, carried away by her subject, described the life she wished each girl to lead, in language which caught their ears but was beyond their understanding, and only spoke in all its beauty and truth to Phœbe's heart. They were to treat life as a pathway leading from earth to heaven, along which they were to walk steadily, contentedly, thankful for happiness, but doing what was right, whether it cost them pains or not. And Phœbe drew closer to Miss Camilla as she went on.

She had heard her spoken of with awe by Rose, with fear mixed with admiration by Mrs. Cooper, with scorn by Joanna. She herself had felt her chilling autocratic manner; had seen that she must bow, as well as others, to her iron rule. She had been inclined to rebel, almost to repent that she had come, when the few words spoken from Miss Camilla's heart revealed to her the true woman. The uncompromising love of duty, the utter forgetfulness of self, spoke to the stern Scotch nature Phœbe inherited from her father's people, which had made her face trouble and want bravely, and had given her strength to leave the only person she had left to love, when she found that she could serve him better elsewhere.

With the unquestioning enthusiasm of youth she now ranged herself under Miss Camilla's banner; and, after school, received uncomplainingly, indeed quite cheerfully, a little black book, with the names of eight or nine children written at the beginning, whom

she was to take charge of the following Sunday.

"I pity you," whispered Joanna ; "the Waters are the worst family in Wyncote, and you have three of them. So I was right after all, Phœbe : Maple said the squire was come, and there he is."

They were now in the churchyard, and Miss Camilla had joined her mother, who, leaning on the squire's arm, was coming slowly under the trees along the path from the manor.

The news of Mr. Wyncote's arrival had spread already far and wide through the village. Mr. Browne, with a sigh of relief, made up his mind that the school question should be broached to-morrow. Dr. Foster announced to his wife that he should instantly tackle the squire about the drainage of the pond ; while Mrs. Foster's head was shaken ominously, as she asked, in a solemn voice, what was to be expected from a man who travelled on Sunday.

But there he was, a pattern squire, with Miss Camilla by his side and his mother on his arm, making his progress to the church door with his hat raised courteously in answer to each greeting, and there were many. There he was, walking up the aisle gravely and calmly, without apparently seeing the many eyes fixed upon him, and sitting down in the green baize pew, leaving an impression behind him that he was a good fellow after all ; and, as he settled himself in a corner, kicked a hassock away, and crossed his legs, he was glad that he had come. It was pleasant to be the great man of the place. He had had a twinge of gout the other day which had made him half inclined to settle down, and the unspoken homage he had met with to-day flattered his vanity, and he thought settling would not be unpleasant after all.

He had a project in his mind, however, without which the settling—which included, of course, hunters, a stock of game, and other

expensive amusements—could not be carried out ; and, as he thought of this, he moved his place in the pew that his brother's name might not stare him in the face ; for possibly his project might ruin the prospects of Stephen's son, as in old days he had ruined Stephen's.

And Miss Camilla's heart overflowed with thankfulness. She had forgotten her displeasure ; how could she have been displeased with Piers ? The best of all dreams was coming true—he was going to live at home ; the money saved from the wreck of his fortune, and which he spent now on his own pleasure, was going to flow in channels dug by her charitable hands ; and, in her happy castle-building, she actually forgot after church to complain to Mrs. Cooper of Joanna's gossiping.

“We are so glad to be at home again,” said that lady, in a mournful voice, as they parted in the churchyard ; “and Joanna is quite well again, and George was everything to us in Rome.”

“Indeed!” answered Miss Camilla, looking sharply at Rose, and determining to find a suitable heiress for her nephew as soon as possible; a determination which made her singularly inquisitive that evening as to the age and appearance of the Liverpool merchant’s daughter.

“I can tell you very little, Camilla,” the squire answered carelessly; “twenty, I believe; I am afraid, however, that George is not to be coerced for the good of the place. I am going to smoke a cigar on the terrace.”

Miss Camilla turned red at the discovery of her plot, and looked round to make sure that Phœbe had not overheard the squire’s words; but she was sitting by one of the windows at the end of the room, with a book of sermons open on her knee, and her head resting on her hand, while her eyes were fixed on the sunset, and her thoughts were evidently far away.

So Miss Camilla sat down at the writing-

table, to make an arrangement for Phœbe's day on paper.

One of her plans was that each hour and half hour should be filled with some pursuit, and accounted for each evening. She herself lived by rule, and took herself severely to task when she had digressed from her morning's plan in any particular. She now wrote down the hours of Phœbe's day, and their several occupations; the time for attending on Mrs. Wyncote in red ink, that for improvement in blue, and for amusement in black.

Phœbe promised compliance, and sighed as she looked at the card in her own room. She had been brought up very differently from English girls, she thought, if a life mapped out like this was usual with them. For her, who was accustomed to spend her days in little housekeepings, in small shoppings, in amusing her father, and drawing at all odd moments, it was very hard to settle into such methodical ways; but

Miss Camilla, as she gave it her, had spoken of duty, and Phœbe supposed it was right. Then to set against it, her life was free from the anxiety which had made each day a burden. She had only one great sorrow left; and, as she laid her head on her pillow, her tears fell fast as she thought of the long months which must pass before she should see her father again.

Her daily duties began with Mrs. Wyncote. She was to read the *Times* to her each morning from ten till eleven, and she sat, on Monday, by the old lady's side ready to begin her task.

“ You must read loud and clearly,” were Miss Camilla’s last directions as she left the room to attend to her clothing-club, thinking that her brother was safe on the terrace below with his cigar; whereas, half an hour before, he had sauntered slowly down the steps, and down the yew walks which led to the river.

He remarked to himself, as he passed

along, how much the hedges needed clipping, how many fingers and toes were off the statues which stood in their dark green niches, how weedy the pond was, and how dilapidated the seats.

"It will want a good deal of money to put things to rights," he remarked, half aloud, as he flung the remains of his cigar away. "I knew Camilla's first thought would be the prospects of this money for George. I am glad I kept the affair in my own hands. If she had had the management of it she would have made the old man believe that I was only fit to be led and managed for till I died. But, perhaps the boy should have his chance; I never thought of living here till I felt that twinge of gout the other day; however, he is too great a fool to seize his opportunity. He would sooner earn his money than marry it. He must have inherited the inclination from the mother's side."

The squire was out of the unclipped walks now, and in the fields beyond the

garden and the old-fashioned wilderness—fields with a river running through them edged with old pollards—with large trees standing on the soft grass, and cows eating lazily in the spring sunshine. The squire had never been this way since the year he came of age. As he walked by the side of the stream he could fancy himself twenty-one again. There was a tuft of golden marsh marigolds in the same place, close to a pool where Stephen and he had fished in those days long ago. The water rippled by, singing the same low song it had sung then and ever since; the fallen tree, which had served as a bridge, was still lying across the stream, and he remembered balancing himself on the middle of it, while Stephen admired him from the bank. The iron gate leading into the Mill House garden was before him. How he and Stephen and Camilla had loved scampering down from the Hall, to eat strawberries and cream, under the mulberry-tree on the lawn, with the old aunt who lived there then.

It was seldom the squire remembered his young days ; they gave him pain, and he was accustomed to shove all painful thoughts aside : but to-day the things of long ago haunted him. Perhaps the river song of days of youth, and love, and happiness, was trying to teach true wisdom to his middle-aged, selfish heart. But the words “Punctuality is the soul of business. Ten o’clock to the moment,” broke upon his ear, and frightened away the sound of the stream, which rippled on unheeded. “And notwithstanding this place being out of reach of all but the Great Eastern railway.”

The squire’s hat was raised, as he drew himself up rather proudly at this unceremonious greeting ; and he saw a short, stout man, with close-cut grey hair and sharp grey eyes, standing in the gateway.

“Mr. Ashton, I presume,” he said. “I hope I have not kept you waiting, Lord Wargrave told me you would be here at ten.”

"Only just arrived—only just had time to walk round and see if it is likely to suit me. I don't see why not. Let us go over it together;" and Mr. Ashton moved away from the gate, and led the way down the gravel walk, which skirted the river which had once turned the old manorial mill.

"Everything is in shocking disrepair, but money can put that to rights. The house wants refurnishing from the garret to ground-floor; but expense is nothing to me. The rent is high, but, as I said to Lord Wargrave, we should not haggle about that."

"You can have it by the year if you prefer it," said the squire. "Do you object to a cigar?"

"I am proud to say I never smoked one in my life, but pray do not let me interfere with you. If I had not denied myself all luxuries of the kind I should not be here now. Save the pennies, I say, and the pounds will take care of themselves. I shall take the place by the year, as I can hardly say how

long I shall stay. I am looking out for an estate to suit me. I suppose country squires are all pretty well sold up; and I shall want to buy something ready made. I am not going to build myself a kind of workhouse at the top of a hill; a place all bright red brick and brand new stone copings; no, something old and respectable for me. Do you know of anything likely to come into the market?"

"Several," answered the squire, without changing countenance. "I shall have much pleasure in introducing you to them, and to their half-ruined masters, when you are settled at the Mill House."

"Some people have called me a fool for settling in these parts," went on Mr. Ashton, as he stood at the hall door, and looked through a row of trees to the perfectly level distance; "but my answer is, 'I passed my young days sweeping out a grocer's shop at Ely. I was born in the fens, and I intend to die as near to them as I conveniently can. I'm all for a country that, like a quiet, well-

behaved woman, changes its gown twice a day, instead of living, like the rest of the world try to do, among moors and lakes and hills, which dress and undress twenty times in twelve hours.' Shall we go through the house? I've been through it before; dining-room small, but will dine fifteen; this room can be my daughter's morning-room; and the drawing-room will do—it is only for a make-shift after all."

"When do you intend to settle down?" asked the squire.

"Oh, directly, directly. Money can do everything; I shall give *carte blanche* to one of those furnishing men, and it will be done in a month. It is money that makes the mare to go, as I dare say you know, Mr. Wyncote. This lawn must be levelled for croquet; Lydia never looks better than when she is playing at croquet."

"Is Miss Ashton coming down to look at the house?"

"Oh no! Lydia likes to see nothing till it

is finished, and I humour her. We shall be down in a month. You see I've kept my fly. I have an appointment at three. I shall catch the next up train ;" and Mr. Ashton jumped in, shut the door, and was gone.

The squire stood on the little lawn, and looked after his new tenant, who had trodden ruthlessly on all his most cherished prejudices, who had spoken as if money were all, and birth, the one possession the squire had not been able to spend, and which he therefore valued highly, nothing.

It took him quite five minutes to recover his equanimity; but the sight of the old gardener, waiting patiently for a word of greeting, helped its return; and he strolled out of the garden trying to feel again that he was Wyncote of Wyncote, treading on land his fathers had owned a thousand years; a person of immense importance—a fact which, for the first time in his life, he had been inclined to doubt; while his tenant, who had begun life by sweeping out a shop at Ely, was patronizing him.

The homage of the old gardener was hardly sufficient, however, to soothe his wounded vanity. He thought he would try a little more of the incense which had been so gratifying yesterday ; so he cut across the fields to a road which led to the village, and looked in at the farm house, where he and Stephen had drunk milk and fed the chickens in their earliest holidays.

He had always kept away from his tenants during his short visits, lest they should ask him for new roofs for barns, or gates for their fields ; but to-day his self-love had been wounded, and needed balm, which was applied without stint by the farmer's wife, who, having seen him from an upper window, flew down to welcome him in the full glory of her Sunday cap, pulled hastily out of its band-box.

But, though he followed her through hen-houses, cow-stalls, and dairy, and smiled at her voluble greeting, his spirits would not quite return. He was too much used to walk-

ing through the model farms of his prosperous friends on Sunday afternoons, not to see how tumble down all his own buildings were ; and he looked so grave and pre-occupied when he bade the farmer's wife farewell, that she felt sure the poor gentleman had something on his mind ; and, pitying him with all the sympathy of an honest heart, unhooked his picture from its nail on the parlour wall ; and, though it was washing-day, took it out of its frame, and scrubbed the glass with the soap-suds she had ready to wash her children's frocks.

It was the only way she had of showing her feeling for him ; and it was with great distress that she found, when she hung it up again, that her scrubbing had answered very little purpose, and that the lithograph itself was spotted and blurred past remedy.

And the squire walked down the road sad of heart. His wish to settle down had grown stronger since he saw the difficulties to be overcome. The need of money stared

him in the face. He saw his way to thousands, but still (and he thought what a good fellow he was) he would leave the first chance to George. He would look at no more farms to-day; he would take the path to the Hall which led across the fields from the rectory gate; and he was just turning to open the gate when the vicar—returning from the school more indignant than ever at the ignorance of the children—caught him as he laid his hand on the latch.

“I am sure, Mr. Wyncote, you will allow me a moment. I was just thinking of coming up to the Hall to try and find you at home. Will you come into my study, and let us have a word about school expenses?”

The squire professed himself delighted; he had just been wondering whether Mr. Browne was at home; he was surprised to hear that there was a want unsupplied. The school was so very near his sister’s heart.

“But it is lack of funds, Mr. Wyncote,” said the vicar, as they stood at the door of

the gabled parsonage. "If you can help us with funds we are all right."

"What a lovely cotoneaster!" remarked the squire; "I never saw a finer one. Is much money needed, Mr. Browne?"

"I have it all down in black and white; if you will give the wood and carting the expense will be trifling."

"Still it is money, money," sighed the squire to himself, as he sank languidly into an arm-chair in the vicar's study. "It will be impossible to live here without money."

Mr. Browne opened the drawer of his writing-table, and tossed a manuscript on the table as he looked for his memorandum.

He was a learned man; and had left his comfortable college two years before, thinking that duty called him to something better than a Don's life; he had come to Wyncote with Utopian ideas, founded upon books, of renovating a sleeping parish, and turning its labourers into men of letters. But he was grievously disappointed. The school was in

as low a state as could be passed under Government; the people came to church at Miss Camilla's orders, but slumbered while there; his sermons were beyond their comprehension, and he felt might as well have remained unpreached; the night-school had died a lingering death; and there were moments when he would gladly have returned to the quiet old quadrangle, and spent his time in getting his treatise on arrowheads ready for publication, instead of teaching the four first rules of arithmetic to ploughboys.

But in the life he lived, in his ivy and cotoneaster-covered vicarage, the early Britons, with whom he had been so familiar, were becoming strangers; the Greek plays, which had been his pastime, were lying unread on his shelves; he had exchanged learned conversations with old friends in the combination room for passages-at-arms with Miss Camilla and Mrs. Foster; and to-day the school flooring was forgotten in his delight when the squire pointed to a rough sketch outside

the manuscript which lay on the table, and making some remark on ancient warfare, drew the vicar from his search for the memorandum to a chair on the opposite side of the hearthrug.

He so seldom found a kindred spirit, a man who could treat these matters with the importance they deserved. The squire's learning and information was as great, apparently greater, than his own ; and in discussing the warlike habits of their forefathers, the peaceful needs of their descendants were forgotten, till the squire and he were parting at the vicarage gate.

"Oh ! by-the-by, I forgot to give you the estimate," said Mr. Browne.

"Never mind ; the wood is quite at your service. Take any that will suit your purpose from the carpenter's yard ;" and, as the squire raised his hat and walked away, the vicar said, as every one else had said for nearly forty years, "What a good fellow he is !"

And the squire, pleased at the impression

his learning had made, and relieved at being asked for wood instead of hard cash, relinquished his intention of going back across the park, and walked on towards the village.

He had reached the old wall shaded by the elm-trees, dressed in their early green, and had stopped to look at a pond on the other side of the road, covered with weeds, while a tumble-down cottage seemed to hang nearly over the muddy stagnant water, when a gig pulled up suddenly behind him, and in a moment Dr. Foster had leaped from it, and stood by his side.

"How very fortunate!" he exclaimed. "The very thing I was longing to speak to you about; but I see you have found it out for yourself. It is a nest of fever."

"Draining it will be very expensive," said the squire.

"Yes; but an unavoidable expense. It ought to have been done years ago. I could count off ten people or more who owe their deaths to that pond, in the last few years.

I must be off to a broken leg ; " and the doctor was in the gig and the gig had whirled away almost before he had left off speaking.

The squire's discomfort returned as rapidly as it had vanished. The smell of the pond was certainly most unpleasant ; and the thought of the ten people who owed their deaths to it gave him a little shudder as he climbed the stile that led into the shubbery, on his way home. The absence of money oppressed him again, as he walked under the beech-trees and watched the pheasants doomed to be shot by another gun than his.

" Not even rich enough to shoot my own game," he said to himself, as he reached the house door.

He was so engrossed with his thoughts that he almost forgot to be civil to Rose Cooper, who came up at the same moment, and who accompanied him up the wide staircase ; and when he reached the saloon

he threw himself silently into the yellow silk arm-chair by the fireside.

Phœbe was still reading aloud to his mother, and her voice was getting husky.

"I have not heard one word. You may begin at the beginning of that leading article, and read it all over again," Mrs. Wyncote had said, as the squire entered the room; and Phœbe was obeying when Rose stepped forward and bent over Mrs. Wyncote's chair.

"It is so nice being up here again;" and Rose seemed to be sunshine itself, with her yellow hair, and blue eyes, and sweet smile. "Miss Camilla said I might come; she is talking to mamma about a scullery-maid. May I read to you instead of Phœbe? and has she made a picture of Fido? She draws so beautifully."

"A picture of Fido; how delightful! Phœbe must begin at once;" and in a flutter of excitement the old lady watched Phœbe, who, filled with gratitude to Rose for relieving her, began her sketch and listened in

her turn to the leading article; and the squire sat on and thought how comfortable the saloon was—how pleasant it would be to sit by his own fireside, if only there were money.

CHAPTER VII.

THE village of Wyncote was rarely excited for long ; and as the squire departed on Tuesday, the gossip about him, the Mill House, and the millionaire who had taken it, soon died away ; even the old almshouse women left off speculating as to the future, and everything was as it had been.

Rose and Joanna almost began to forget that they had ever left home. Joanna had to turn over her sketches, and study her journal, to be quite sure that those flowers which had once sunned themselves on the walls of the colosseum, and now lay dried in the little locked-up book, had been gathered by her own hand. And Phœbe felt as though the life she had lived with her father must have been a dream ; and as she sat in

the stately and gloomy saloon, reading to Mrs. Wyncote, and obeying Miss Camilla's orders, wondered if she could be the same girl who had watered her plants and sung to her birds high up in the sunshine, and bargained for chestnuts at the corners of the streets.

She was happy after all. There was a great charm in the quiet dignity of the place—so unlike the bustling England to which she had first been introduced in the London hotel, where she had passed one day with the Coopers on their journey home.

The old Squire Wyncote of Queen Anne's days, who had had himself painted by Sir Godfrey Kneller, and who had loved Italy and Italian art, had left his stamp in the carved ceilings of the saloon and gallery, in the white marble mantelpieces, and in the statues, so mutilated now, which stood, each in its green niche, down the yew walk. These, even in their ruin, delighted Phœbe, recalling as they did the land from which

she came. But the English beauties of the place delighted her, too. She studied the tapestry in the breakfast-room, that it might serve for backgrounds for future pictures. She filled her sketch-book with light-and-shade drawings of the armour in the hall, and of the crusaders in the church. She liked to sit in the deep embrasure of one of the windows in the gallery, and listen to Rose, as she told her the history of the family portraits, of the Holbeins, the Vandykes, the Lelys, and the one Gainsborough which was the pride of Miss Camilla's heart. She finished her portrait of Fido for Mrs. Wyncote, and sketched with Rose and Joanna, who toiled after her a little hopelessly, but who declared that they had learned more in a fortnight by watching her than any master had hitherto taught them in a year.

Owing to the training she had received from her father, who could see beauty in every landscape, she could even admire the

wide plains of the country round; and thereby so won Miss Camilla's heart, that she allowed her to continue wearing the gold cross without reproof.

Phœbe began, in the companionship of girls of her own age, to forget that her father had been unhappy here; she forgot that Wyncote had ever seemed mournful to her; and she could write happy letters to Rome, and wait patiently for the news from the maestro, which came regularly every Monday morning. She had soon learned that Sunday letters were unheard of at Wyncote Hall.

But the calm, which had once more fallen upon Wyncote and its inhabitants, had not entirely returned to Miss Camilla.

While she worked at some clothes for a needy baby, or cast up accounts, whether she was teaching a school girl or rebuking Joanna, her mind wandered from schools, parish business, and the training of young minds, to the marriages she was determined to bring to a prosperous conclusion.

She had never been thwarted yet. If she had made up her mind that Joe Baker would be an improved man, would leave the public-house, and would come to church if he married Jane Cook, the thing was done; and Joe found himself a married man before he had thoroughly made up his mind whether Jane Cook was the person he preferred. It generally answered very well; Joe and his fellow sufferers acquiesced patiently, the neat house kept them from the Lion, and after a bit they rather liked going to church with their wives, and the village prospered.

The only person Miss Camilla had ever had any trouble with was George; but then she had never had a possible *fiancée* close to Wyncote before, and of course those delicate matters could not be managed from a distance. It would be all right now, and she wished that there were as few difficulties to be overcome before Phœbe could be landed at the vicarage, the haven of rest Miss Camilla had provided for her.

But the obstacles in the way appeared insurmountable, and, what was worse, had been built up by Miss Camilla's own hands, for she had never been civil to Mr. Browne, under the excuse that her mother disliked visitors; and she could not suddenly change her tactics and ask him to the Hall.

After some days she began to fear that she must give up her idea, when Rose unexpectedly came to her assistance.

Phœbe had found Sunday-school teaching a more difficult matter than she had expected, and Rose had undertaken to show her how to prepare her lesson, in the way that Miss Camilla had taught her long ago to prepare hers; and as they sat together at one of the open windows of the saloon, with the soft air blowing about the yellow curtains, she showed Phœbe how a lesson was to be learned here, and a point to be brought out there.

Phœbe was anxious to please Miss Camilla, and listened attentively, playing

with the pencil she had used for taking down notes of all Rose said as she did so; and as she listened the scene in the Book of Samuel stood before her like a picture, and almost unknowingly she began to reproduce it at the bottom of the paper.

"Why, that is just what I have been wanting to do myself all these years!" cried out Rose, seizing the sketch and clapping her hands. "You shall illustrate the principal subject of the lesson each Sunday. I never drew well enough myself to manage it. Look, Mrs. Wyncote," she went on, walking to the fireplace and laying the little drawing just under the old lady's spectacles, "here is David behind the rock, and Jonathan far off, and the arrow falling here. How well the rock and the arrow are done. Your class will be the most popular of all, Phœbe; and each child must carry a picture home in its turn!"

So the illustration went down to the school the next Sunday morning with Phœbe's little black book; and when it was

produced, at the end of the hour and a half, and was passed round for inspection, the buzz of admiration which greeted it caused Mr. Browne's class to turn their heads, and made him ask severely the cause of the disturbance.

"I am very sorry," said poor Phœbe, blushing violently. "I had no idea that they would talk. I hope I have done no harm."

"Look, Bill," said the happy possessor of the sketch, shoving it into his elder brother's hand; and, as the elder brother was at the top of his class, the sketch of David and Jonathan was waved in front of the vicar's eyes, and the vigorously-drawn arrow shot from Jonathan's bow stopped his rebuke suddenly. It reminded him of the subject so very near his heart, of the article on arrow-heads in the table drawer at the vicarage; and he gave the illustration back to the boy, wondering what opportunity he could find of asking Phœbe to make proper drawings

of his specimens, in which case his article might be enlarged into a most valuable book.

He thought of the matter all the evening as he sat in his arm-chair. He imagined the sensation his dissertation on ancient warfare would make in the literary world! There was very little left to finish, and he had always felt that illustrations were the one thing wanting to make the work a success.

Few people possessed such a collection as his, combined with such a knowledge of early history; and if that pale young lady in black, whose name he had not caught, could and would make these drawings for him, his fame as a *savant* was made.

He forgot the tiresome boys and stupid girls; he forgot the annoyance which the slumbering faces below his pulpit had caused him that very afternoon. The loneliness and disappointed stranded feeling, which had weighed his spirits down since he had been at Wyncote, seemed suddenly lifted off. He could bear annoyance, and vexation,

and absence from the intellectual life which had been like his native air, if he could only feel that his name would still be heard in his own college ; that his picture even might some day hang in the old library to be looked at respectfully by undergraduates yet unborn ; that the wave of forgetfulness would not wash his memory away, like a child's sand castle by the sea, as it had done that of many silent scholars, who had lived and toiled in the grey old courts only to wake one day to find their work forestalled, to see some younger man before them in the race, and a new edition in the press of the same great author on whose works they had spent their lives, and only wanted a month to complete. Mr. Browne had always felt that this would happen to him and his arrowheads. He had looked carefully each week down the list of new announcements with a beating heart, and then given a sigh of relief at having at any rate another week's reprieve. And yet, in the depression caused by his want of

success at Wyncote, he had no heart to finish the manuscript, and had hardly touched it for months ; for two years it had lain in his table drawer, jostling with notes for sermons and village accounts. But the idea of illustrating it fired him now with fresh courage ; and, drawing his chair to the table, he corrected diligently far into the night.

Arrowheads haunted his slumbers, and were his first thought on waking ; and he was hopelessly searching at breakfast for an excuse for calling at the Hall, after the passage-at-arms he had had with Miss Camilla, when he remembered the squire's promise of wood for the flooring of the school. This was excuse enough ; and, with his pockets weighed down by flint implements, he started for the Hall as soon as his hour's teaching in school was over. He almost trembled at his audacity in making such a request to a stranger, as he followed the butler up the stairs ; but every one, he felt convinced, would understand the intense interest of a collec-

tion such as his, and would be too proud at being called upon to present it to the world. He would not allow himself to think that the young lady could say no, and annihilate his day-dream.

The butler flung open the door of the saloon, whose faded yellow silk contrasted with the deep oak wainscoting of the staircase, and showed him Miss Camilla reckoning up her club-money ; Mrs. Wyncote knitting by the fire ; Fido by her side, profaning the silence by short, sharp barks ; and, lastly, the slight young lady in black, who, sitting with the *Times* in her hand, was to decide the fate of his book.

Mr. Browne longed to plunge at once into his subject, but he restrained his impatience ; and, after shaking hands with Mrs. Wyncote, sat down by Miss Camilla, and began to ask some question about the promised flooring ; but he fidgeted as he did so, for the arrowheads weighed heavily in his coat pocket, and knocked against the gilding of the yellow chairs.

Miss Camilla was gracious, and listened attentively to all he had to say. She did not wonder at his nervousness, for of course he would naturally expect her to be a little annoyed at the question being referred to Piers, when she had pronounced boarding the school to be an unnecessary innovation; but she could be magnanimous and forgive, and she promised to look into the carpenter's yard that very afternoon, and inquire into the state of the timber. But her magnanimity was the result of anxiety to give Phœbe a comfortable home at the vicarage, which could only be accomplished by making Mr. Browne welcome at the Hall, and he must not go without the first step being taken; so, rising from behind her writing-table, she said, with a wave of her hand in Phœbe's direction—

"Let me introduce you to Miss Heron, Mr. Browne. She has been so good as to help us in the Sunday-school the last two Sundays."

"And that reminds me," said the vicar,

hastily, to cover his nervousness, “I was much struck by a sketch which Miss Heron had made. I put some specimens from my collection in my pocket”—and here he produced about twenty arrowheads—“in hope that she might be induced to do me a great kindness, and make me some drawings from them. This one especially,” he went on, bringing a flint, with a microscopic inscription on it, close to his short-sighted eyes, and shoving up his spectacles, till they sat astride on his forehead, “this one especially is worthy of your attention. Only remark where it was discovered. What new light it throws on the whole of ancient British history!” and he thrust it eagerly into Miss Camilla’s hand.

She took it and examined it carefully. Her knowledge of ancient races was rather confined to the Saxons, with a mere glimmer of a Danish occupation; but she would not display her ignorance on any account, nor seem to throw cold water on a science

which must assuredly bring one of her schemes to pass; so, nodding her head slowly over the arrowhead, she replaced it on the table, and said she was sure that Phœbe would be delighted to help Mr. Browne.

"Yes, indeed," said Phœbe timidly, "if I can do them well enough."

She was touched by Mr. Browne's rugged face, on which, through all the heaviness of feature, there had suddenly shone out the same expression she remembered seeing in her father's countenance when he had been carried away by the beauty of some sculpture or painting.

She was determined that she would do her best for this grey-haired man, whose hand quite trembled with eagerness as he arranged his treasures under her eyes.

"Phœbe must not draw in the morning, when I want the *Times* read," said Mrs. Wyncote.

"It shall not interfere at all," said Phœbe quickly, seeing a shade of disap-

pointment in Mr. Browne's face. "I will do two first of all," she went on, turning gravely to him, "and then if you are satisfied I can go on."

"I can never thank you enough. If Miss Wyncote will allow me, I will look in again to-morrow. You will take care of them," he said to Phœbe, giving a last loving look at his treasures; and, with his spectacles once more seated on his nose, he made his way down the stairs, and went home across the fields, hearing the echo of the applause which was awaiting him in the literary world, in the song of the birds and in the murmur of the soft spring wind.

And Miss Camilla finished counting her club-money, and closed her book with the comfortable sensation of having been successful. If only George were likely to be as tractable as the vicar, she felt that the object of her life was attained; that she would be prime minister under Piers as king, with George—become a rich man—to serve as

chancellor of the exchequer, and with Phœbe at the vicarage working out her plans for the benefit of the village.

Wyncote would then hold up its head again. The schools would equal, if not surpass, Lady Wargrave's at Foxlow; the green glazed calico on the children's bonnets should be replaced by ribbon, the ponds should be drained, the cottages rebuilt, and she should feel that she had lived to some purpose.

"So this is the result of Jonathan's arrow," said Joanna, late that afternoon, as she stood by the table in the window where Phœbe was beginning her work. "You will never have done. Mary, the vicarage housemaid, tells Maple that Mr. Browne has drawers and drawers full of stones and bones. Of course you can't come out; and Rose sent me up here, the moment she saw Mrs. Wyncote pass on her way home, to see if you could sketch with us. She was to meet us in the avenue."

"I will get up early to-morrow," said Phœbe. "The arrowheads will soon be done : they shall not interfere with our sketching ;" and the two girls walked sedately down the stairs—for even Joanna was quiet at the Hall,—and then ran down the beech avenue to meet Rose, who was coming towards them under the trees, with her sketch-book in one hand and a camp-stool in the other, while the afternoon shadows played on her grey gown and scarlet cloak, and almost cast a shade over the bright face and sunny hair.

"I heard from the maestro this morning, Rose," said Phœbe, as they took their positions before the crusader in the church ; "he says papa is well, and that he shall be able to make the money I left last till I get more. What should I have done if you had not helped me ? How miserable I was that evening in the Via Condotti ! and comfort came next day, all through you, Rose. I can never repay you."

"No !" said Joanna, "I am thankful to

say that Rose has no scientific tastes, and cannot set you to work, like Mr. Browne. Now let us finish the crusader."

But he was not finished that day, nor the next: his coat of mail defied all attempts at speed. And meanwhile Phœbe's life went on pleasantly. She watched Tuesday follow Monday, and Wednesday Tuesday, and, as she changed her illuminated card each day, wondered that she should feel so happy so far away from Rome. Her days were certainly chequered by Mrs. Wyncote's selfish querulousness, and by Miss Camilla's busy, sharp manner. She was glad sometimes to get away from complaints of village girls who had thrown up places, of mothers who would not pay regularly into her club, to Rose, with her sunshiny face and quiet gentle ways.

But she was very happy. Even the evenings, which she passed silently by the fire, opposite Fido's stool, watching Mrs. Wyncote sleeping in her arm-chair, and helping Miss

Camilla in the manufacture of frocks and pinaflores, were not dull.

As she sat there she would people the stately old room with the heroes and heroines of the few novels she had read in her window over the Piazza di Spagna, among her flowers, with her birds singing over her head.

Rose had told her how old the house was. She had taken her into every nook and corner, and shown her hiding places behind pictures in the gallery, and in the tapestry-room downstairs. Priests had been hidden there in Elizabeth's time, before the Wyncotes had thoroughly made up their minds to drop the old faith ; and why should they not have come out, when all but the master of the house had gone to bed, and sat by the fireplace where Fido was snoring now ? Why should not Amy Robsart have lived in a room like this, and rushed to her death through a tall door like the one which opened on the staircase ?

As she sat and worked she made the people, whose fate she had cried over far away in Rome, come out and act their parts again on the slippery floor, with the back-ground of yellow silk ; and her heroine was always the image of Rose, the Rose who had helped her in her distress, whose sweet face had shone down upon her in her moment of greatest trouble. At present the hero was a blank. Of course he spoke, and acted, and swore to love the heroine till death ; but he was a mere walking gentleman, a mere piece of pasteboard, and though she searched for some figure to fill his place, none ever came.

The squire was charming, and had delighted Phœbe ; but who could imagine him the centre of a love story ? and besides him there was only Mr. Browne, and once Phœbe caught herself laughing aloud at the idea of the vicar as a hero of romance.

" Now you have woke mamma, you had better get out the backgammon board," Miss Camilla remarked gravely ; and the phantom

men and women vanished suddenly, and seemed folded away in the old-fashioned blue print, which left such marks on Phœbe's hands; and she shook the dice, and tried, till ten o'clock, not to beat Mrs. Wyncote.

Perhaps her laugh had broken up more visions than her own. Perhaps, in Mrs. Wyncote's dreams, a young man in a blue coat and powdered hair had just stepped forward to ask the honour of walking a minuet with her. Perhaps her own father, in the dress of five-and-twenty years ago, had stood beside Miss Camilla's chair; and Stephen Wyncote had been talking politics on the hearth. Who knows? But if so, Miss Camilla's sharp tone was to be forgiven.

Phœbe nearly laughed again next morning, at the thought of Mr. Browne figuring in any sentimental situation, when he appeared, as usual, laden with arrowheads and enthusiastic over her work. Apparently his drawers were as full as Joanna had described them to be, for she copied sheet after sheet

of flint implements, and still he ever returned with more.

Miss Camilla was delighted. She was more than hopeful: she felt as if the thing were done, as if he belonged to her already, and therefore began to throw over him the protecting egis with which she covered everything remotely connected with Wyncote's interests. They were as one, even about the ventilation of the school, and Mr. Browne consented to adopt an economical plan suggested by Miss Camilla. She was quite sorry that there was no wood fit for the purpose of flooring in the carpenter's yard, and almost began to feel that the idea of both improvements had emanated from herself.

In the mean time the Mill House was in the hands of London workmen. The old paint was scraped; the old papers, which had seen generations of tenants, were torn down, and all replaced by colours chosen carefully by Miss Lydia Ashton; not mauve, and grey, blue, and other tender tints, in which her

friends indulged : Miss Lydia's taste was too well educated for that.

She had been brought up at Miss Plantan's great academy, established in a splendid old country house, where Miss Merton, the assistant mistress, said, "you might feed on the glories of the past."

The mantle of the departed lords and ladies seemed indeed to have descended upon the offspring of the plutocracy, as they danced quadrilles under the coroneted ceilings of the great drawing-room, and swept magnificent curtseys to the mistresses before going to bed.

But Miss Plantan's education aimed at more than this. The young ladies were brought up worshippers of highest art. She took her seat on Ruskin's "Stones of Venice," and had lecturers from South Kensington who lighted her pupils' steps with his seven lamps. Her intentions were wise and good. She wished to give her pupils a hatred of all that was mean, and base, and sordid ; to raise

them entirely above the mammon-worship in which they had been born. But though it answered with some of her favourites, she had only succeeded in throwing a varnish over Lydia Ashton's love of money, and of what money could buy.

Lydia learned that high art approved of dark colours in a room; of flowing lines in dress. She learned, indeed, from Ruskin, that all work should be beautiful throughout, and could repeat his sentiments by heart till she almost deceived herself into thinking the sentiments were her own; but his precepts had never penetrated the surface of her self-satisfaction. She had imbibed a love for old rooms and fine staircases; and when the other girls indulged in visions of the future, as they talked together over the great fire-places, where giant dogs supported modern grates, she quietly scorned their day-dreams of balls and parties, and possible coronets. Her ambition was to gain an old name, such as her father could not give her; an old

house and park, where her money would place her in the best position, and give her the greatest power among all commoners in the country round.

Since she had lived in London with her father she had treated the young men of her acquaintance with quiet disdain. They had worshipped at a distance, wondering at this girl with her stiff, grand manners, whose dress consisted of simple, flowing lines—lines at least as simple and flowing as highest fashion could admit; a contrast to their own sisters, with their flying ribbons, multitudes of flounces, and numerous lockets.

She had superintended the decorations of the Mill House carefully, but from a distance, because, as her father had boasted, she looked at nothing incomplete. She chose the thickest paper, in imitation of ancient stamped-leather work, for her drawing-room, watching with satisfaction while she did so that a fine lady whose carriage, adorned with coronets and supporters, waited for her at the

door, laid down the same paper with a little sigh at its expense.

She chose deep colours for the passages and smaller rooms; and, when she heard that the staircase must be painted and varnished to hide the numerous ravages time had made, her well-educated nature shuddered at the slightest approach to deception; and hearing of a carved one to be sold out of a tumble-down house in the city, she made her father buy it, and set it up in the Mill House in place of the old one.

"My daughter is indefatigable," Mr. Ashton remarked one afternoon to Mrs. Cooper, whose pony-carriage was driven daily by Joanna to watch the progress of the work. "I have just come down to see how it all worked in. Lydia is a most remarkable person—one of those few cases where an old head is found on young shoulders. I have spent hundreds—I may say thousands—on her education; and in a case like this I give *carte blanche* as to

expense. ‘Though this is merely temporary, Lydia,’ I say, ‘spare no money to make it such a place as you can be happy in, even for six months.’”

“I suppose you have been to the Mill House, Joanna? You seem to live there,” said Miss Camilla, when the pony-carriage pulled sharply up by her side, as she came out of a cottage opposite the village stile.

“I thought you would prefer it to my getting my news through Maple, Miss Camilla.”

“And there is not much else to do,” sighed Mrs. Cooper. “I must say that, after Italy, Wyncote feels a little wanting in interest.”

“And how you longed for its quiet, mamma, among the churches and palaces! It is a pity sight-seeing can’t be bottled up in spirits, like snakes and scorpions, and kept, as Mr. Browne keeps his arrowheads, to be had out when one is bored, a drawer full at a time.”

" You can't think how well the Mill House looks, Miss Camilla," said Mrs. Cooper.

" And all Miss Ashton's taste," said Joanna. " I am longing to see her. Maple says she hears that she is very handsome. How odd that Lady Wargrave should be in the country, Miss Camilla ! I wonder what has brought her ? She has just passed us on the road. You will find her at the Hall." And, as Miss Camilla disappeared over the stile, Joanna whipped on her pony.

" My dear Joanna," remonstrated her mother, " at your age I was so much more silent, and more respectful to my elders."

" Miss Camilla does not mind it, mamma. I am sure she likes it better than being treated like a mad dog."

Miss Camilla hurried home through the shrubbery and across the park. She wondered, with Joanna, what had brought Lady Wargrave from London. At any rate, she should hear some account of the daughter

of the millionaire, and perhaps some news of Piers and George.

Lady Wargrave's carriage was at the door as she entered the house, and Lady Wargrave herself in the saloon, chatting cheerily to Mrs. Wyncote, and she came forward to meet her friend with both hands stretched out.

They had been presented at the same drawing-room, but Lady Wargrave looked twenty years the youngest now; there was no trace of grey in her hair, hardly a wrinkle in her face, no tone of sadness in her voice. Life had gone well with her. She had a good husband, plenty of money, and plenty to do. There was a sore place in her heart, however, though no one saw it. Perhaps the excessive energy which made her superintend the arrangement of every flower-bed in her garden, the proficiency of every school-girl, and the affairs of her friends and neighbours, was due to the efforts she made to be happy, when the only little feet which had ever

pattered over the floors at Foxlow lay quiet in the village churchyard.

But to whatever cause her energy was due, the result was that everything she possessed was perfect of its kind; and if she could have had her way, everything her friends possessed would have been perfect too. She could not bear to think of poverty and distress, or indeed any discomfort; and she had never rested till Lord Wargrave had offered to educate the nephew who was likely to succeed him. She now took Camilla's hands in hers, and threw the little black bag on the sofa, as she kissed her. She was the only person left in the world who ever kissed Miss Camilla.

"I have come down only for three days, Camilla, and have torn myself from Foxlow to spend a quarter of one of those days with you, for a very particular reason. How well Mrs. Wyncote looks" (Lady Wargrave always thought every one looked well), "and you, too, Camilla. I am sure ruralizing suits

people of our age, though of course I must not think of leaving London yet," and Lady Wargrave paused, apparently merely from want of breath.

"Joanna Cooper told me she saw you pass," said Miss Camilla. "What brought you down, Harriet?"

"Ah, yes; I passed Mrs. Cooper. How well she is looking; and Joanna too. I was obliged to come down, Camilla. I saw a new shape for a garden bed at the Crystal Palace the other day, which would fit in to the vacant space close to the conservatory, and of course I must see it cut out myself. Then I have just heard of a new summer costume for choir girls, which would just suit mine, with of course a little alteration to make it quite peculiar; and I had to be sure the school mistress understood my directions: and last of all I wanted to come over and see you."

She added this in a low voice, and drew closer to Miss Camilla; but Mrs. Wyncote

was ruminating on the gossip she had just heard about the grandchildren of the people she had known in her young days, and Lady Wargrave went on unnoticed.

"The fact is, Camilla, my lord told me he had recommended a friend of his to take the Mill House; he fancied it would suit both Mr. Ashton and the squire. I hear that it is being fitted up, and I have made full inquiries as to the family."

"What day is Miss St. John's wedding?" asked Mrs. Wyncote.

"The wedding is to be on Thursday, and you shall have full particulars, Mrs. Wyncote. And so, Camilla, the moment I discovered that there is but one Miss Ashton (actually no son, and she heiress to all this money), I at once settled that George must marry her. I must have your full permission before I move in the matter; but I am sure I have that. I shall call on Miss Ashton the day after to-morrow, make acquaintance, ask her to a musical party next week, try to get George

to meet her, then finish off the affair at my flower-show in July, and Wyncote will be restored by Christmas. You must give the county a dance in the gallery, Camilla, when the weak places are mended, and I will open the ball with the squire. And now I must be saying good-bye, Mrs. Wyncote. What a long visit I have paid! but only a foretaste of what it will be in the summer, when I am settled at home again. I have Clara and all the children coming to Foxlow in July, Camilla."

"James will be ready for Eton soon, I suppose?" said Miss Camilla.

"Yes; he goes in September;" and Lady Wargrave repeated the words again, with a little sigh, as she drove down the avenue.

James was the eldest son of her husband's heir; and the remembrance of her own boy, whose place James would fill, and who was lying under the little tombstone in Foxlow churchyard, came sharply back. She never forgot him, it is true, but some days the pain

and loss were more present than others, and this July would have seen him twenty-one.

When the overpowering feeling of loss swept over her heart, she generally started some new plan, or plunged more bravely into other people's affairs; but to-day she was driving alone, with nothing to distract her thoughts, and when the women, looking over their garden gates, calling to the children who were dawdling home from school, envied her as she rolled by, she envied them; for had not their sons lived while hers had died?

Phœbe and Rose put the finishing-touch to their crusader's armour that afternoon, and then lingered under the trees in the park, talking.

Phœbe's hero was becoming something better than a lay figure; it was beginning to wear yellow hair and a beard, and was tall and muscular, and was like George Wyncote. It could hardly have been otherwise. George had been the chief interest in Rose's life since she had come to Wyncote with her mother

and Joanna, when she was a tiny child, and her conversation with Phœbe began and ended with him.

Down in the meadows he had gathered her forget-me-nots in summer, and marsh marigolds in spring.

Here he had dug up primrose roots, to plant with his own hands in Rose's little garden. "And look at these cowslips, Phœbe," she said to-day, as she threw her drawing-bag on the grass, and gathered handful after handful. "It seems such a little while ago since I sat on the branch of this beech-tree, and George made me a fat cowslip ball and tossed it in my face. I shut my eyes sometimes, and bury my nose in a heap like this, and try to fancy it is my first cowslip ball again, but nothing has ever smelled quite like it since."

So it is not to be wondered at, that, as Phœbe had heard his name so often through all this fortnight and more, the hero, who worshipped the heroine, Rose, should

no longer be a mere walking gentleman, but should talk and look like George.

As she worked at the little blue pinafores in the yellow saloon at night, he was Leicester bowing over Amy Robsart's hand; he was Ivanhoe; he was Captain Greatheart in the "Pilgrim's Progress"—a copy of which Phœbe had received from Mrs. Foster, with a page turned down to mark the place where old Pope is gnashing his toothless jaws at the passers-by.

But George was soon to be a greater hero than Leicester, or Ivanhoe, or Captain Greatheart. He was to rise to the greatest eminence of all, as principal actor in one of the past scenes of Phœbe's own life.

Such small events influence our lives. George was still away from London on business, and his landlady was whitewashing and repapering his rooms. Her consternation, therefore, was great when a packing-case arrived at her door.

She did not venture to unpack it in the

street in George's absence, yet the box could not be carried through the little passage without scratching the walls which were her pride and glory. In despair, therefore, she redirected it to Wyncote Hall, and took her chance of its owner's displeasure.

"A box has come for George," said Miss Camilla, a day or two later, as Phoebe sat, with the open *Times* in her hand, prepared to read to Mrs. Wyncote. "These are the things which disarrange the rules for one's morning so dreadfully. I must superintend the unpacking of it."

"I shall come and see the box opened," said Mrs. Wyncote.

"No, mamma, you really must not; there is no fire in George's room, and it is to the north;" and Miss Camilla's steps were heard going down the passage.

The old lady knitted a few rows discontentedly, and listened fretfully to one article in the *Times*, till, as the sharp strokes of a hammer sounded from George's room, her

curiosity got the better of her accustomed obedience to her daughter's commands, and she told Phœbe to give her her stick.

"And your arm, too, child. I'm going to see myself what George has bought; it will amuse me. Why shouldn't I be amused as well as Camilla? She lets me do nothing. I shall be tired if I drive to the station! I shall catch a cold in a room without a fire in May! She always had her way from the time she was a child;" and, leaning on Phœbe's arm, she pattered down the passage, the heels of her boots and the tap of her ebony stick warning Miss Camilla of her approach.

But she was too much engaged to pay any attention. When Phœbe and Mrs. Wyncote entered George's room at the end of the passage, she and Symonds were taking the last nail out of a large packing-case.

"It is a picture," said Miss Camilla. "How foolish to buy such things! We must lean it against the wall till we know where

George wishes it to be hung. Come, Phœbe, and help me to lift it out. You are sure to catch cold, mamma."

"It is quite warm," said Mrs. Wyncote indignantly, from the arm-chair in which Phœbe had placed her.

The picture was lifted out, and Phœbe undid the folds of paper by which it was protected. She was standing at the back of the frame; and, till Miss Camilla and Symonds had turned it round and placed it on the sofa, leaning against the wall, she did not see its subject. Then, as she raised her eyes from the paper she was folding up, she saw an old machicolated castle, a grey sea and sky, and a solitary bird flying away.

It was her father's picture bought by George. It was George who had been their good angel,—George who had saved them from want, who had helped them silently, never asking for thanks, never letting them even guess they were indebted to him. She owed as much to him as she did to Rose.

"What are you staring at?" asked Miss Camilla sharply, as she wiped some dust from the frame.

"It is the last picture papa painted," answered Phœbe quietly: and then Mrs. Wyncote said that she had come for nothing, that the painting was uninteresting and dull, that it was a pity George bought such rubbish; and, getting on her feet again, made Phœbe take her back to the saloon and to the leading articles.

Miss Camilla stayed behind, and looked at the picture. It was, she thought, like the sigh of a broken heart. He must have meant it for an image of his own career. Was it not also like her life? Was not her life waste and desolate? The living thing left there was usefulness in Wyncote; how would it be with her if that Sunday's forebodings came true, and, like the bird, it was to fly away for ever?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE beech-trees in the avenue had deepened into their summer green, the roses were in full flower on the walls of the almshouses, when the Mill House was at last completed, and Miss Lydia Ashton was expected to come home.

A barouche, with its pair of horses, had travelled down the day before, and, driven by a magnificent coachman, had passed through Wyncote this summer afternoon, on its way to the station.

The widows had clustered on their side of the palings to see it go by, and for the last half-hour of lessons the school children had paid no attention to their books, in an agony lest it should return, and the rich man's daughter be whirled through the village without their seeing her.

And while all Wyncote was astir, waiting and watching for the dust the carriage would make, Miss Camilla was sitting by the bedside of one of her favourite school girls, feeding her with jelly she had brought from the Hall, and speaking at the same time so tenderly and gently, that the girl began to wonder that she had ever feared her.

"I shall get better now the summer is come," said Mary, gratefully, when she had eaten the last spoonful. "The wind rattles through the windows and walls in the winter; but it is pleasant now to get air, whichever way it comes."

Miss Camilla looked round the wretched garret, and sighed. The staircase that led to it was merely an old ladder; the roof shelved down to the floor on three sides; there were green stains of damp on all the walls; and the beds, lying close together, revealed the small amount of air poor Mary had to breathe through the stifling summer night.

"I can push you nearer the window, I think," said she, rising. "Shall I try?"

"Oh no, thank you, ma'am!" answered the girl. "Mother tried that six weeks ago, when I was first took bad; but the water comes in at that corner of the room, and dripped upon my bed, and she had to shove me back again. But I am very happy here," she went on, seeing Miss Camilla's troubled face. "It is so quiet till the boys come home; and now, as they smoke out of doors, the tobacco doesn't come up through the chinks in the floor to make me cough; and I hear the birds sing in the elm-trees, and I can see the rooks through the window. Don't mind about me, ma'am. I'm noways dull."

But, notwithstanding the girl's words, Miss Camilla crept down the shaking ladder with a heavy heart, to the room below, where the mother was at her wash-tub, where the floor was broken, and the window was half covered with paper.

That the children were at school was owing to Miss Camilla, and she had also the comfort of feeling that this was no marriage of her own making; but the cottage belonged to her brother, and was a disgrace to the estate.

"You should mend your windows, Jane," she said, looking round at the cobwebby ceiling and dirty bricks.

"It ain't no use," answered the woman, hopelessly, as she swept the soapsuds from her arms. "The lead is broken, and there ain't nothing to keep in the glass."

Miss Camilla sighed again. She felt, for once in her life, that she had no business to find fault with Jane's want of cleanliness, when so much was to be laid at her brother's door. If the cottages were put to rights, how much she should be able to do—even with a person as hopelessly untidy as Mary's mother. She would then feel authorized to superintend cobwebs, and insist on windows being mended. What a Utopia Wyncote

would be if there were only money—only money! And there, as she stood at the door, she saw it come, in a barouche drawn by two good steppers, with a coachman and footman in sober liveries, in the shape of a young lady, in a faultless bonnet, who looked at Miss Camilla as she passed, and then turned and looked again before the carriage disappeared round the corner beyond the pond. What a contrast the pair of horses were to those at the Hall! What a contrast the barouche was to her mother's old carriage! What a contrast was Miss Lydia Ashton's look of prosperity to her own shabbiness!

"I am so glad to see you," said Mrs. Foster's voice, close by her. "I see you are looking after the new comer. Poor Miss Ashton! As I was saying to Mrs. Cooper just now, what a temptation money is!"

"Money is a great friend, as well as a temptation," answered Miss Camilla, think-

ing of the wretched garret she had just left, which the wealth Mrs. Foster lamented over would repair; and, followed by the doctor's wife, she made her way towards the village stile.

"I hope my young friend Phœbe Heron is all that you can desire, Miss Camilla," went on Mrs. Foster, who had evidently the intention of accompanying her back to the Hall. "I was sorry to hear, from Joanna, that she was wasting her time in illustrating this book of Mr. Browne's. I so dread science, Miss Camilla, for one brought up as she has been; there is no knowing whither it may lead."

"It can do no girl any harm to be good-natured," answered Miss Camilla, beginning for the first time in her life to think that Mrs. Foster was interfering; and, changing her mind about going home, instead of crossing the stile, she turned down the village street, under the shade of the old elms.

"I have just met Mr. Browne," said Mrs.

Foster; "and I ventured to say a word in season as to the great good Mr. Meadows has effected in Lindon by cottage prayer-meetings. I ventured to suggest that a weekly meeting at the almshouses might meet with great success; but I was repulsed, Miss Camilla, as usual."

"Mr. Browne is going to begin a Wednesday-evening service in church, of which I thoroughly approve. I shall insist on its being attended by all the servants from the Hall," answered Miss Camilla, who had now reached the palings which separated the almshouses from the village, and from whence Mrs. Foster, startled at seeing her husband's gig drive by at this unusual hour, hurried home to see if she were wanted.

She hurried home full of indignation at Miss Camilla's base desertion.

Had any remark she had made against Mr. Browne in the two years he had been at Wyncote fallen on barren ground before? Had not Miss Camilla, till now, been only

too glad to find fault? and had she not shaken her head, in concert with Mrs. Foster, over every step he had taken. And yet she, Mrs. Foster, had received two rebuffs; the first, when she had lamented over his sermons the first Sunday after Phœbe's arrival, and the second now. Surely two months ago Miss Camilla would never have approved of a Wednesday-evening service. She would have called it an innovation. She would have saluted Mr. Browne in her stiffest manner at their next meeting, and would have forbidden the attendance of one maid from the Hall.

To what could this change be owing, unless it was to Phœbe Heron, who must be taking Mrs. Foster's place with Miss Camilla, and artfully bringing in Roman principles? "Poor Miss Camilla!" she ejaculated, as she gave her husband his dinner, "poor Miss Camilla! I fear she has fallen into bad hands."

But Dr. Foster was in too great a hurry to be off again on another long round, to pay attention to his wife's sighs, and Mrs. Foster had to keep her indignation to herself.

On her side, Miss Camilla was grateful to the doctor for coming home unexpectedly. She was much displeased with the way in which Mrs. Foster had spoken of Mr. Browne. She forgot that till now she had been as interfering as the doctor's wife, and had looked upon the vicar as a man to be annoyed and avoided. She was glad that she had changed her mind about going home, and that, by coming by the almshouses, she had shaken off her friend. Also the widows must be rebuked: they were in a state of commotion; they were gossiping in front of their houses, and fluttering in and out of their doors in a most unseemly manner; and Miss Camilla disapproved of gossiping, and would have had them always sit, composed and placid, by their firesides or in their sunny doorways. But to-day even her presence could not calm them. They were listening to the words of the most ancient among them, who, leaning on her stick, was describing Wyncote's bygone glories.

"I be telling them, Miss Camilla," she said, as the latter began to speak—"I be telling them that, when I was a young woman, living in the cottage yonder, I stood at my door, with the children holding my skirts, and looked out for the old squire and Mrs. Wyncote on their way home after they were wedded. They are looking after this rich young lady as is come to the Mill House; but she has only two horses, and the old squire had four. He could have had six or maybe eight, if he had chosen; but he put up with four. That was a fine sight, Miss Camilla. I wish I may live to see him as is the squire now drive through the lodge in a carriage and six. That will be a sight worth looking after, better than folks that don't belong to the family at all."

It was no use hoping to bring order into the widows' ranks. There was nothing for Miss Camilla to do but to let herself through the little door in the wall, and, leaving the gossip, to run on, under the old sundial, to take Lady

Wargrave's letter of that morning from her pocket, and read it again, as she walked under the beech-trees.

Lady Wargrave wrote most hopefully. George was back in London, and had obeyed her call. He had dined with her, and met Miss Ashton, who was well educated and pretty, and all that heart could desire. George had been as civil as possible to her; and she was sure everything was *en train*; and Wyncote should be repaired by Christmas, and she would open the dance, which Camilla would give in the old gallery, with the squire.

Yes! money had come. She was sure that George had only to stretch out his hands to take it, and restore the family to its old glory. She would call on Miss Ashton to-morrow. She would make her at home at the Hall. She would leave no stone unturned to bring the marriage to pass. Surely she would not meet with disappointment.

She carried out her plans forthwith. The next afternoon she called in state, with Mrs. Wyncote, at the Mill House ; and, leaving her mother in the carriage, was shown into the drawing-room.

Under any other circumstances she would have been distressed and horrified to see the garlands of roses which had covered the walls in her childish days, and which she had admired and loved, replaced by the expensive leather paper Lydia had chosen ; but she was determined to be pleased, and even tried to persuade herself that she was delighted with Miss Ashton's half-patronizing manner. She studied her, as she sat in a comfortable chair by the window, which Mr. Ashton had ordered to be opened to the ground, and agreed with Lady Wargrave that she was pretty. She was tall and slight, with a small head, and plenty of dark brown hair ; and, though there was an expression in her mouth once, which Miss Camilla did not thoroughly like, still it had

disappeared as suddenly as it had come. Of course it was simple ignorance of the world, and of the manner in which people like Miss Wyncote were treated, which made Miss Ashton converse as if her visitor were a person of her own age; and Miss Camilla followed her on to the lawn to see the improvements made in the garden, endeavouring to devour her dissatisfaction at the disappearance of all her old familiar friends,—the large tufts of sweet-williams, and bushes of Provence roses, having been ruthlessly swept away, and their places filled with neatly-cut beds, laid out in bands of colour according to the newest fashion.

“One comfort is that, as George’s wife, she can never alter Wyncote,” she thought to herself, as, after inviting Miss Ashton to luncheon next day, she drove away by her mother’s side.

She thought of nothing but Lydia’s visit all that evening and next morning. She made Phœbe bring in fresh roses to brighten

up the saloon. She put all her pinafores and little frocks into their cupboard, and the brown library books put into the bookcase downstairs. She was almost as nervous as she had been at Phœbe's arrival, when Symonds opened the door, and announced, "Miss Ashton."

And Lydia was so perfectly composed, as she swept in. She said just the right thing to Mrs. Wyncote, as she came up to her with the step and manner she had practised at Miss Plantan's. She showed pleasure at seeing Miss Camilla, and she slightly patronized Phœbe and Fido. Her toilet was faultlessly simple. There was, in short, nothing to object to, and everything to approve of; and yet Miss Camilla had to repeat to herself again and again that she liked her, and approved of her choice for George.

At luncheon, Lydia talked enough, and not too much. She told them that her father was coming down on Saturday. She

spoke of her numerous occupations ; and when, after luncheon, she remarked the interest Miss Camilla took in the last sheet of arrowheads which Phœbe had finished, she said a few scientific words which were most apposite, and which she had picked up at the last lecture she had listened to at school.

When Mr. Browne appeared at two o'clock, to claim the final instalment of illustrations, she was introduced to him, and hinted gracefully how much her heart was set upon schools and parish work ; and by the time she had been at the Hall an hour and a half, Miss Camilla was converted even from the slight doubt she had felt at first, and, figuratively speaking, she took Lydia Ashton to her heart, and proposed to show her the house.

Of course Lydia was delighted. There was nothing she enjoyed more than going over old-fashioned places, and Lady Wargrave had spoken so much of Wyncote.

She followed Miss Camilla through all the passages, into the housekeeper's room, lined with cupboards full of choice old china. She was shown the hiding-place in the tapestry-room, and the little door which opened on the terrace from a narrow staircase leading down from the oak passage, and through which the priests had escaped from their pursuers. She delighted in the armour in the hall; admired the pictures on the staircase; was enthusiastic over a room where, within heavy bed-curtains, and under nodding plumes, King James the First had slept; and was finally conducted, with pride by Miss Camilla, into what, in her girlhood, had been the gem of the house—the old gallery. The floor was on a different level from the landing outside the door of the saloon; and, as Lydia stepped up and entered, she looked down the long room with complacency.

This was the kind of house she had imagined herself mistress of—a house which,

with her father's money, might be restored, till it was almost princely.

Lady Wargrave had described the past glories of the family, and had introduced the heir of it all with peculiar emphasis. She was sure that she had only to show that the idea was not a disagreeable one to her, for Mr. George Wyncote to be at her feet, take her out of the sphere in which she was born, and which she felt to be unsuitable to her refined taste and exalted nature, and raise her to a position which would entirely satisfy her ambition.

This gallery pleased her most of all, with its row of tall Elizabethan windows, filled at the top with painted glass, on one side, while generations of Wyncotes long dead and gone lined the opposite wall.

Here was a Holbein ; there a Vandyke of the man who did not fight for Charles ; here a lady, in a stomacher covered with pearls, and with a nose like Miss Camilla's ; there a cavalier, with hair and eyes like her nephew's.

They all gazed down proudly on their descendant standing beneath them ; looking, in their laces and satins and jewels, as if they belonged to another race of beings than the shabby lady in the black gown ; as if they had carried all their magnificence away with them when they went, and left her nothing but their line of features and the little bit of point lace, which from their ruffles had crept up to her cap.

There were Wyncotes of Sir Joshua's days and of Lawrence's, and, last though not least, a picture, by Gainsborough, of the squire's grandmother, standing with a peacock behind her and a dove on her hand.

"This is the best picture we have," said Miss Camilla. "Just step back nearer the door, and look at it in that light."

Lydia Ashton did as she was bid ; she stepped back to the door of the gallery, with her hand over her eyes to shut out the light, that she might enjoy the Gainsborough ; when, going too far, she suddenly missed her

footing, and fell over the low step at the entrance.

"Have you hurt yourself?" asked Miss Camilla anxiously, hastening to help her to her feet again. "I never saw you were so near the doorway. I am so excessively sorry. Can you stand?"

"Not very well just yet," said Lydia, turning very white; "but I shall be quite well again directly. I think my ankle must have twisted," she went on, as she tried to get up.

"How very provoking," said Miss Camilla, making Lydia sit down on the step, while she disappeared into the saloon to ring the bell. "You must not think of going home," she went on, as she returned: "you must stay here till you are better. Mr. Ashton would have a right to think me inhospitable if I allowed you to go away. Symonds, will you help me to carry Miss Ashton into the saloon? There," said she, when Lydia was safely deposited on the

yellow sofa; "now we must send for Dr. Foster; and, Symonds, if he is not at home, Perkins must fetch Dr. Owen from Foxlow."

Lydia's foot hurt her too much to allow her to take more than a faint pleasure in the bustle she was exciting; but Mrs. Wyncote laid down her knitting to pity her, and forbid Fido to bark when Dr. Foster came. Phoebe was sent to the medicine chest for lint, and the linen closet for rag; and Miss Camilla was in her glory, for, next to the pleasure of keeping a village in order, came that of superintending any phase of illness.

She despatched a message to Miss Ashton's maid at the Mill House, to order her to come up at once and bring her mistress's clothes. She wrote a letter to Mr. Ashton explaining what had happened, and promising to take the greatest care of his daughter; and she was beginning to realize the great advantage it would be for George to have Lydia at the Hall for an almost indefinite time, when Mrs. Foster appeared, armed with every appliance

suitable for every injury to the leg, from a slight strain to a broken bone.

Dr. Foster would be at the Hall in half an hour, she explained. She imagined if she came herself, that, between Miss Camilla's doctoring and her own, no harm could happen in that time. She hoped she had done right in preventing Perkins going on for Dr. Owen; and, in a flutter of excitement lest her husband should linger and lose this great opening into the rich Mill House, she proposed every remedy she could think of, from cold water to leeches.

"I am much better now," pleaded Lydia, roused by the sight of the leeches. "Indeed, Miss Wyncote, I am giving so much trouble that I had better go home;" but her proposal was negatived, and, on Dr. Foster's arrival, her ankle was bound up, and she was ordered to lie still, which she did after a few more protestations.

And Miss Camilla was delighted. How could her plan prove anything but successful now?

She made Lydia at home at once ; begged Phœbe to devote every spare moment to the amusement of her guest, and dressed her foot morning and evening with her own hands.

The furniture of the saloon had never been displaced before ; but now, for Lydia's sake, a yellow silk sofa was moved away from the wall, and placed in the window by Phœbe's drawing-table ; and with her foot propped up on a pillow, Lydia lay in great comfort, talking to Mrs. Wyncote, and making patronizing suggestions to Phœbe about sketches she was copying for Miss Camilla.

And Miss Camilla bustled in and out all day, anxious that no trouble should be spared to render Lydia happy in her imprisonment. She made Rose and Joanna come up daily, and pressed George to run down from London next Saturday to stay till Monday. She was delighted when he obeyed at once ; and prepared herself to receive him with an affection she had never shown him since he had taken to business.

Lydia was lying on the sofa in the saloon, with Phœbe at the table beside her winding silks for some elaborate work which lay on Lydia's lap, when he came on Saturday evening.

She blushed slightly as she heard his step on the stairs.

It was natural she should do so, when Miss Camilla and Lady Wargrave had never left off extolling him as all a man could or should be; and Phœbe coloured too, deeper than the crimson silk before her, and her heart beat, and her hand trembled as she wound the skein.

It was her hero coming.

To Lydia, George was the heir of Wyncote; to Phœbe, he was the man who had helped her in her need. She longed to tell him how grateful she was, how grand and good she thought him, when he came, bringing a sense of energy, strength, and good humour with him, into the still and solemn room.

She drooped her face over her work as he came forward over the oak floor, and wound on, the blush covering her neck and forehead. Of course she should have no opportunity of thanking him: she was no one in the house; she must not expect to be noticed. Perhaps one day she might be alone with him for a moment, and could tell him how grateful she was. She only hoped that he would not recognize her now, lest any one should remark the colour in her usually pale cheeks.

She heard him speak to his grandmother and aunt. She heard him ask Lydia after her sprained foot, and knew that he was patting Fido, and, as he was stooping down, she ventured to look up.

Yes! there he was, with Fido jumping round him in an asthmatic manner; there he was, all life and strength, as she had seen him first under the ilexes in the Pamphili Doria.

He had not perceived her as she sat

behind Lydia's sofa, and she could take a long look without being found out; but Fido's breath became short, and he had to retire, panting; and then, before she was aware, George stood up again, and caught sight of her glowing face.

"Miss Heron, I did not see you. Forgive me," he exclaimed, as he came to the table. "Is Mr. Heron well? and the old maestro? and do you find England sunny enough to live in, after Rome?"

And what could Phœbe say? She could only blush still deeper, and stammer out that she was happy. She could not say, "How good you were! How grateful I am!" but, if her tongue was silent, her countenance spoke for her, and the gratitude which was lighting it up woke into beauty the still, sad face George had seen at Rome.

As he looked at her he was well pleased at having obeyed his aunt's command. He needed but little excuse at any time to come to Wyncote. He loved each tree and stone

about the place, and was always happy when, in a pause in his bustling life, he could stroll down the silent yew walks, and feed the peacocks on the terrace. But this evening he felt that Wyncote was pleasanter than ever, and that he should enjoy his two days' holiday even more than usual.

As he talked to Lydia and his grandmother, and made Fido take short runs to the hearthrug after imaginary mice, he speculated all the while as to the cause of the blush and smile with which Phœbe had received him.

Had she helped to unpack the picture of the Maremma, which his stupid landlady had sent down here? If so, he forgave the officiousness of the latter, which had caused him to be so welcomed.

And, while he talked, Phœbe noiselessly gathered up the silks, laid them by Lydia's side, and stole gently away to her own room. She was very happy, without knowing the reason why. She could have danced down

the oak passage ; and sung, as she had sung to her birds in the saloon above the piaffi. She took the white gown, which she had remodelled from an old one of her mother's, from the drawer in which it lay, and spread it on the bed.

Was it good enough for to-night ? Alas, it must be. She had nothing better ; and yet she did so wish to look her best. She stood and looked at it, and smoothed it out here and there, and then settled that she must brighten it up with a flower, and that there were plenty of roses near the pond, which she might take.

So she ran quietly down the narrow stairs which led from the oak passage to the little door through which the priest had escaped long ago, and on to the wide terrace, down the grey, lichen-covered steps flanked with balustrades on each side, and between the green yew walks, to the pond.

How delicious a summer evening it was ! How quiet all seemed in this quaint old

garden, with the nightingales singing in the trees away by the wilderness, and the rooks whirling above her head, to settle in the walnut-trees which sheltered the church.

If she only had her father here, England would be perfect.

She reached the pond, and found a rose, and then turned slowly back again. It was a pity to go indoors one moment before it was necessary.

She arranged the green leaves behind the rose as she walked, and as she did so she sang lightly to herself. The words and air must have sounded strange in the ears of the maimed statues, as they looked down from their green niches. Perhaps the Italian sculptor who had carved the mantelpiece in the saloon was the last person who had sung them, as he had remembered childish evenings in Rome, and walked between the yews.

It was only a little song she had learned from the padrona's children long ago, which

she had sung with them as they had all danced together upon the pavement in the summer evenings. To-day she repeated the words, and the half merry, half melancholy tune, again and 'again, her footsteps keeping time with the refrain, till she stopped at the end of the green walk, and blushed again, and was silent—for there was George.

He was leaning against the balustrade of the steps which led to the terrace, with his head on a level with a huge stone shield, which a lion couchant supported in his paws. The sun was streaming over the front of the house, gilding its many windows, and lighting up his figure, and the green and blue plumage of the gorgeous peacocks, as they stood, halfway down the steps above him, with their tails spreading like trains behind them.

He was throwing bread to the birds; but turned his head, as he heard Phœbe's step, and came towards her.

“Here I am, feeding the peacocks, Miss

Heron," he said. "They are always glad to see me, and come to meet me as soon as I put my foot on the terrace. What a picture they make in the sunshine!"

"I want to thank you so much," said Phœbe, taking courage at the word picture. "You bought that painting of papa's, and never told us it was you who had done it. You can hardly imagine what that money did for us. We can never thank you enough."

"So you found me out," said George, with a little nervous laugh. "My landlady ought not to have sent it down. I never intended you to know."

And Phœbe only stood silent in the evening sun, and blushed instead of saying anything more.

How ignorant and stupid she must be, she thought. Surely any one else would have had some excuse ready, instead of looking foolish. Even the peacocks could look as if they thanked George for the bread he threw them; and she had said so little—not half enough to show her gratitude.

But there was no time to say another word, even if the word had been on her lips. There was the dressing-bell ringing through the house; so, murmuring something about Miss Camilla expecting her to be ready early, she ran up the steps, and took refuge in her wainscoted room.

CHAPTER IX.

"You will amuse Miss Ashton till church time, George," said Miss Camilla, as she rose from her early breakfast next morning. "She will be in the saloon about ten o'clock. Phœbe and I have just finished, but there is plenty of tea left," she went on, looking into the teapot; "and Symonds will bring you fresh toast. I suppose that Mr. Ashton will be here this morning; they say he came by the last train yesterday evening. Come, Phœbe. Where is your class book?" And in a moment Miss Camilla was off, followed by Phœbe, and George heard the house door shut behind them.

As he rang the bell for the toast he felt ill-used and irritated. It was all very well to be civil to Miss Ashton in London, when

Lady Wargrave begged him to devote himself to her; but here, when he wished to enjoy the country, to have to act host to a young lady with a sprained ankle, and spend his time in amusing her, was very hard. A Sunday, at any time, did not allow many hours for visiting the old nooks and corners he now saw so seldom; and, if every spare half-hour was to be taken up in entertaining his aunt's guests, he should see no one—and nothing.

He wished he had offered to go to the school with Miss Camilla; he could then have chatted to the widows, have walked down with Phœbe, and have seen Rose.

However, Miss Camilla's word in such a case as this was law; and, having finished his breakfast, he strolled out of the front door, and round the tower at the corner of the house, to smoke a cigar on the terrace till ten o'clock.

As he stood at the top of the steps, and looked down towards the yew walk below

him, he thought how wonderfully pretty Phœbe had looked the evening before, coming out of the deep shadow into the sunlight with the crimson rose in her hand.

He thought of her still as he strolled down the steps, between the stone lions, and on between the yew hedges as far as the pond.

How dilapidated the old fountain was, which stood in the middle of it!

The stone boy seemed perpetually trying to blow soap-bubbles for the benefit of any spectator who might arrive from any of the four green walks which centred here, as he stood, with his head bent back, and his cheeks puffed out. When George was a child a little jet of water still sprang into the air—a poor remnant of the glory of the fountain; but for many years even that had failed, and the stone boy stood on in the summer sun, puffing out his cheeks in vain.

George turned back to the house, wondering if his youthful dream of making the

fortune of the family, of mending the fountain, and putting fingers and toes on the statues in the green niches, would ever come true. He walked slowly, and thought deeply, as he smoked his cigar.

He was beginning to-day to wish for something more than money enough to repair Wyncote. He was beginning to think that a sweet face to greet him after his day's work would be a pleasant sight.

He had had an offer only this week which would place him in a better position in the mercantile world, and yesterday he had nearly made up his mind to refuse it, for he was doing well as he was, and accepting it would entail much work and more responsibility.

He did not shrink from work; he was young and strong; he had taken to commerce out of a manly feeling of independence, and with a determination to "rise up early, and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness," from being early taught the

miseries arising from his uncle's follies. But he had shrunk from the responsibility, and had nearly determined to go on in the line he was in, with the prospect of partnership and wealth in the dim future. To-day, however, he was changing his mind; the sweet tone of Phœbe's voice, stammering out yesterday evening the thanks she considered so insufficient, had rung in his ears ever since.

Why should he not try to win her? Why should he not accept the post which had been offered him, to-morrow, and put himself in a position to come to Wyncote in a few months time, to ask her to be his wife?

Yes, he would. Why should he shrink from responsibility? What was a man worth who shrank from it?

As he determined his future, he threw away his cigar, and walked on with a quick and decided step.

Notwithstanding all the energy he had

shown—all the honesty, straightforwardness, and perseverance, which had made him valued by his employers, he had yet needed some strong passion to rouse him to become his best self, to make him something better than a mere man of business (degenerating with time into a mere money-maker), to throw unselfishness and chivalry into his life; and that strong passion had woke in him the day before, when, leaning against the balustrade, with the grey shield above him, he had looked up from feeding the peacocks to see Phœbe coming towards him out of the shadow.

Now, as he sprang up the steps, breaking off a bud from one of Miss Camilla's favourite roses to put in his button-hole as he did so, he determined that he would shrink from no trouble which would give him the right to try and win Phœbe for his wife; and by the time he had reached the front door and crossed the hall, he had persuaded himself that he had loved her

from the moment he had first seen her, under the ilexes in the Pamphili Doria.

It struck ten from the stable clock as he ran up the stairs and opened the door into the saloon, where Lydia was already lying, most artistically dressed, on the sofa in the window, smothering a yawn as she listened to Mrs. Wyncote's reminiscences of the early part of the century, which she was relating for the benefit of Mr. Ashton and his daughter. And there was the rich man himself, standing with his back to the looking-glass, in front of the fireplace, listening to his hostess, and, at the same time, looking round the room and studying each object as if he were settling its price.

Lydia's face brightened, and the yawn turned into a smile, as George appeared. Mrs. Wyncote's story remained unfinished, and Mr. Ashton advanced, with his closely-cropped grey head thrown back, like that of the stone boy of the fountain, and his hand extended.

"Mr. George Wyncote, I believe," he said, in a patronizing tone, "I think I had the honour of being introduced to you at Lord Wargrave's the other day. I have just been expressing my gratitude to Mrs. Wyncote for the kindness shown to my daughter in this house. I am a grateful man, Mr. Wyncote—a very grateful man; especially where my daughter is concerned."

"Every one has been delighted to have been of use to Miss Ashton," said George, as he wished his grandmother good morning, and inquired after Lydia's health.

"At the moment you came in," went on Mr. Ashton, "I was admiring that picture over the fireplace. My daughter tells me it is by Sir Godfrey Kneller. I don't profess myself to be much of a connoisseur. As a boy, I swept out Bryce and Holle's counting-house, at Ely, and what should I know of art? But I have picked up a little from Lydia; and that picture must be worth a large sum, Mr. Wyncote—a very large sum."

"What a lovely rose, Mr. Wyncote!" broke in Lydia, uneasy at having no attention paid her. "I wonder if it will be a long time before I can gather one for myself."

"You must accept this in the mean time, Miss Ashton," said George, giving her the flower and turning again to her father, who was standing before the Kneller, with his head inclined on one side.

"I have a few rare pictures," Mr. Ashton continued. "They are at the Mill House, Mr. Wyncote, and deserve attention. I have only just begun to collect. My maxim always was, Save in youth and spend in age; and, now that I have given my daughter the best education money could procure, I indulge myself with a few gems bought at her suggestion. I was, however, nearly making a blunder the other day. Whose painting was it I nearly bought, Lydia?"

"One by Poussin, papa."

"Ah yes! The man had quite succeeded in making me admire it, when Lydia came

in and showed me how like feather-beds the clouds were, "substantial enough for captive princesses to escape upon" she said. But now, Mrs. Wyncote, when I take a holiday, which I rarely do oftener than once a week, I take it thoroughly and breathe as much fresh air as possible. The great secret of success is to work with all your might, and play with all your might. So, with your permission, I will stroll in the park till church time."

"Oh, then, George," said his grandmother, "will you go too, and take Fido a little walk? He so seldom gets out on Sunday. Camilla keeps Phœbe so hard at work that she can hardly find a moment to take him a turn before the evening. You can ring the bell when you go to church, and Symonds will bring him up here again."

"Certainly," said George. "Come, Fido;" and delighted not only at his emancipation from attendance on Lydia, but also at the chance of hearing the words of wisdom, which,

when he was alone with her father, were sure to fall from the lips of so successful a man, he led the way down the stairs, and through the hall into the park.

If yesterday he had been determined to climb halfway up the ladder, to-day he was determined to reach the top ; and surely, he thought, any information which he could gather from Mr. Ashton as to the manner in which he had spent his life would be an assistance to him in fashioning his own.

So, as the short, thick-set millionaire walked, with his self-satisfied strut, under the beech-trees by the side of the young man, whose face, figure, and step, full of hope, energy, and determination, showed that he was starting in the race of life, he was drawn on by his companion to tell of this and that rise upwards. Pleased at finding such a listener, he was nothing loth to give a sketch of his career. He described the days when, as an errand-boy, he had been sent to Wisbeach to look after a shop, on

which the old draper, at Ely, who employed him, had lost money, and how the discovery that the man at Wisbeach was a thief had been the foundation of his fortunes. He described his gradual rise in the draper's confidence till he was sent to Manchester to buy goods, and began to speculate on his own account. He described how fortune had favoured him by throwing him, during a railway journey, into the company of a man who had inherited mills without the inclination to work them; how he had made himself necessary to him, and by judicious management had become a partner; how his fortune was made by thirty-five; how he had married the only daughter of the head of a great firm, at Liverpool, and thereby increased his influence; how his business transactions now extended to China, India, Valparaiso, and Japan; and, while he spoke, George listened eagerly, and wondered, and admired. Every word had a charm for him; for he, like Mr. Ashton, worked at every-

thing he undertook with all his might: and, blinded by the intense interest he felt in the man who had made himself so great in the path he had chosen, he never remarked that life to him had been little more than a perpetual journey—that each rise had been made by clever playing on the foibles of others—that love of self had been his predominant passion. And, when the church bells began to ring, he gave a little sigh to think how impossible it would be for him to make his life an exact counterpart of his companion's. But there was no time for sighing. In the excitement of their conversation they had wandered down the park, and had now to retrace their steps, with Fido puffing after them; and they had hardly reached the churchyard, after committing him to the care of Symonds, before the first couple of green-and-white girls appeared at the lichgate.

A remark, which Mr. Ashton was trying to make his companion hear amid the noise of the bells, fell upon deaf ears, as George

waited impatiently while the remainder of the school-children filed through; and Miss Camilla, who was marching near their head, watched his face as she came forward to speak to Mr. Ashton. There was an eagerness in its expression which made her tremble for the success of her plan, and when she turned and saw the deep blush on Rose's cheeks, she determined that George must be kept out of the way of temptation till his future was safely settled.

If, however, she had seen his careless, brotherly greeting to Rose, she would have known that there was no cause for fear. Phoebe, as she watched the meeting between her hero and her heroine, had felt much disappointed by his manner; it was so very unlike what she had expected.

She could only suppose that books were mistaken; and that in real life a hero took things quietly, and met his heroine, after an absence, with as little eagerness as if they had only parted yesterday. She was equally

puzzled to see him content to listen to Mr. Ashton's egotistical conversation after church, instead of walking home with Rose ; and wondered at his being able so entirely to obey his aunt's order to amuse her guest, when she saw him establish himself by the side of his grandmother's chair after afternoon church to talk to Lydia and herself.

And Lydia was delighted to have an audience again, after the hours she had spent to-day either alone or with Mrs. Wyncote. She was accustomed to dictate to her father on all matters except business—accustomed to see him bow to her decision ; and now, as she sipped the tea, poured out by Miss Camilla and brought to her by George, she took the conversation into her own hands, and discoursed on religious and secular art, in a manner which entranced her father, astonished Phœbe, and silenced Miss Camilla.

What could Miss Camilla say, as she wished to find no fault with her guest, when

Lydia spoke as if the efficiency of the church service entirely depended upon the perfection of the music, and the number and colour of the altar cloths ? And when Lydia was tired of church decoration and Pugin, and turned the conversation upon Ruskin, she was still mistress of the situation.

But when Miss Ashton began on this subject she had learned so much that she never knew when to stop.

She had in her life seen but few great landscapes, and had had few opportunities of studying the glorious realities of earth and sea and heaven ; but she could go on laying down the law on the conventionalities and ugliness of Salvator Rosa, Claude, and Poussin, treating these three painters, indeed, as though they were bank forgers.

George now and then hazarded a contrary opinion ; but though, from having been brought up among works of art in his ancestral home, he disliked that which was ugly, and dwelt fondly on that which was

beautiful, still of Ruskin he was profoundly ignorant.

So, as he sat and listened to Lydia's harangue, he would have been intensely bored if it had not been for the amusement afforded by Mr. Ashton's under current of applause, and for watching the puzzled expression which swept continually over Phœbe's face.

Miss Camilla, who would under any other circumstances have disapproved of any young lady occupying so prominent a position in conversation, sat at the tea-table, persuading herself that her guest was clever, and deceiving herself with the idea that George was admiring her; but she was relieved when Lydia stopped to take breath, and, during a pause which came in the torrent of information, she could ask her nephew to ring the bell for Symonds to take away the tea.

"And now I must be going home," said Mr. Ashton. "I am off again early in the

morning. No, my dear madam, I will not stay to dinner! I have letters to write, and accounts to look after at home. I have always found Sunday evening most useful for that purpose. I shall see you again next Saturday, Lydia. Are you inclined to walk part of the way back with me, Mr. Wyncote?" and, with a patronizing wave of the hand, Mr. Ashton left the saloon. George was very glad to accompany him. Old Mr. Ashton's practical illustrations of Adam Smith were more palatable to him than Lydia's secondhand art lectures, and he gladly followed him down the stairs, and led the way round the tower on to the terrace.

"Ah! this is the short way, I see," said Mr. Ashton. "Very convenient, certainly. What a wonderful person Lydia is!" he continued, proudly. "When I hear her talk, as she did just now, I feel that I may flatter myself that my money has not been wasted on her education."

George made some kind of mock assent,

and then started his companion off again on his own topics, gathering information of all kinds, and regretting, when the iron gates by the riverside were reached and shut again after Mr. Ashton, that the walk was over.

He turned and came slowly back, along the bank of the river, towards the wilderness, weighing carefully all that he had heard to-day. He was more than ever determined to accept to-morrow the post that he had been offered, more determined than ever to win Phœbe.

As he passed the pond and came up the walk, he thought what a contrast she was, with her quiet smile, her low voice and her modest manner, to a self-opinionated, over-taught school-girl like Lydia Ashton. What a delightful Sunday he had had!—to finish off still more pleasantly, for there, as he stepped upon the terrace, was Phœbe's little black figure walking up and down with panting Fido.

"I did not know you would be coming out again," said he, eagerly, as he reached her side. "Have you been here long?"

"Oh no!" said Phœbe; "only ten minutes. Mrs. Wyncote likes Fido to have a quarter of an hour's run on a Sunday before dinner. I shall be going in directly."

"And you are quite happy here?" asked George, who suddenly found conversation difficult.

"Quite happy," answered Phœbe, gratefully. "Miss Camilla is so good, and Rose could not be kinder if she were my own sister."

"Rose is always kind and good," said George. "I wonder why she has not been up here to-day. Has she left off coming up on a Sunday?"

"No," said Phœbe. "I was wondering myself why neither she nor Joanna had come to-day. But Fido's time is up; I must go now;" and, with a happy smile upon her face, she disappeared into the house through the little door.

“What a delightful Sunday!” George thought to himself once more; and then he also followed Phœbe, to find his aunt, and announce his intention of returning next Saturday.

And Miss Camilla was radiant. To her, too, it had been a delightful day. She flattered herself that, thanks to her good management and Lydia’s sprained ankle, the Ashton money would infallibly flow into the Wyncote money-chest. Surely with George coming down for another Sunday, the matter would be well-nigh arranged by the time Lady Wargrave’s flower-show arrived, and the squire would then be present to give his blessing.

In short, it was a day when all were satisfied; for Lydia, lying on her sofa, smelling the rose which George had given her, congratulated herself on the impression which she felt convinced she had made, and flattered herself that this house, which she so much coveted, would shortly be laid at her feet, and

laid there by a man she could be proud of; while Mr. Ashton, sitting alone at the Mill House, turning over letters and papers, was speculating as to the possibility of purchasing a place which seemed to come up to his *beau ideal*, and which, belonging to such ruined people, might be bought for something below its value.

And, if all were pleased, their satisfaction hardly equalled that of the squire, who arrived at Wyncote on Friday, and announced his intention of staying there till Lady Wargrave's party was over. He knew his nephew so well that he was convinced the game was in his own hands ; and, as he stood, the next Sunday evening, at the window, behind Lydia's sofa, watching Phœbe and George as they sauntered up and down the terrace, he saw clearly that, as far as George was concerned, the Ashton money was his.

He turned from the window with the pleasant feeling that he was in reality the good fellow his friends thought him, and

that he had done a good action in allowing Stephen's son to go in and win ; a good action which, like the few others he had been guilty of during his life, had cost him nothing. He saw that he might play his own game now without a shadow of self-reproach, and he devoted himself to his sister's guest with the courtesy he had never known fail.

His task was not a difficult one. Lydia was pretty, her manners were good, and her powers of conversation never failing. The squire's knowledge on most subjects being little more than skin deep, her superficiality did not annoy him ; and, though grateful for the infatuation which drew George to Mr. Ashton's side, he pitied a man who cared rather to talk to an elderly merchant than to his pretty heiress.

It was true that Lydia's eyes had wandered to the hearthrug, where her father and George were discussing some important question, in the midst of a vivid description the squire was giving her of the journey

across the Rocky Mountains ; but he made allowance for a little womanly pique at finding herself unappreciated, and forgave the inattention for the sake of the million. He took care, however, not to betray his satisfaction at the turn affairs were taking to Miss Camilla, who, looking upon Phœbe's future as already mapped out, forgot that her presence at Wyncote might complicate matters ; and satisfied with having, by a few words judiciously said, kept Rose away from the Hall the last two Sundays, was convinced that Lydia was the attraction which had brought George to Wyncote again so soon.

She was delighted, also, to see Piers pay so much attention to her guest. Of course it was for George's sake that he had made time to come home for so long a time as a fortnight ; and, in her gratitude to him, she kept the little brown books carefully out of sight, and worked with Phœbe at the frocks and pinnafores in the privacy of her own room.

And the squire made himself more

charming than ever. There never was any one so clever at telling stories and inventing amusements to pass the time away. Camilla felt as if she had never known him before, and no longer wondered that he was too much sought after to have time to brighten the lives of his mother and sister.

Under his direction a sofa was placed on the terrace, and Lydia carefully carried down-stairs, and established in the shade. He gave her advice as to her work, and read aloud touching passages from great poems. He told her every legend about the place, and promised to show her the crusaders in the church the first day she might walk. In short, notwithstanding her sprained ankle, Lydia had hardly ever spent a pleasanter week than the one which had passed since the squire had been at Wyncote.

"What a happy party you look," said Lady Wargrave, as she swept into the yellow saloon on Friday afternoon. "How do you do, squire? I am come to look you up,

Camilla, and to hope that I shall see you all at my flower-show. Your ankle must be quite strong by next Thursday, Miss Ashton, or I shall never forgive Dr. Foster. You will be just allowed to admire the fruit and vegetables, and then I shall have a comfortable chair ready under a shady tree for you to rest in. What a beautiful drawing of Fido, Mrs. Wyncote! Camilla, pray introduce me to Miss Heron. I hope you will come to my flower-show. Please bring her, Camilla. And now, good-bye: though it is such a hot day, I am flying about looking up my friends. I am going to make Mrs. Cooper bring Joanna, and I have set my heart on having Mr. Browne, as I hear he never goes anywhere. I can see by your face that our little plan is progressing, Camilla," she whispered, as they parted; and then, full of satisfaction at the idea that she should have had a hand in rescuing Wyncote from its ruin, she drove through the village, and stopped at Mrs. Cooper's door.

"You must promise to bring Joanna to my party as well as Rose," she said, as she sat down in the shady little drawing-room. "I shall have quite a gathering from Wyncote. Miss Ashton must be quite an addition to the place. How well you are looking, Rose!"

"I am glad you think so, Lady Wargrave," said Mrs. Cooper. "I was only complaining this morning that she was looking pale."

"I am quite well," said Rose; but the colour faded out of her cheeks, as Lady Wargrave drove away, to capture Mr. Browne with the promise that he should meet an antiquarian as learned as himself, and she leahed her head on her hand, as she looked over the smooth lawn and the geranium beds.

George had been at the Hall for two Sundays, and she had never seen him, except in church. A hint from Miss Camilla had kept her from going to the Hall herself;

but why had he been so content to stay away?

If Miss Camilla had not said those few words to Mrs. Foster last year she would not have been so unhappy: she might have wondered why he never came, but she would not have fretted as she could not help fretting now.

Perhaps, even now, she would not have remarked his absence so much if gossip about Miss Ashton had not reached her ears; but the fact of Lydia being at the Hall, and of George's presence there two successive Sundays, had been a bountiful source of speculation in the village, and had naturally reached Joanna's ears through Maple.

Rose would not have had things different. She was glad for George's sake that money had come at last. Though she longed to hear his step upon the walk, and see him come down the path to the window, she felt that she had no right to expect it when he had guests at home; but Lydia was not

worthy to be George's wife. She was sure, from the little she had seen of her, that she would not make him happy; and day by day the colour faded out of Rose's face, and her step began to lose its spring.

"Why is Rose so pale, and in such low spirits?" asked Phœbe of Joanna, the day after Lady Wargrave's visit. "She is not like herself."

"I think she frets about George," said Joanna mysteriously. "Don't you know that they say he is to marry Miss Ashton? that the squire is here arranging everything? And Rose does not think her good enough for him; but, indeed, Rose would think no one good enough for George. And then, you see, Phœbe, he has quite forgotten Rose; and no one likes that. He used to come to our house, and sit under our cedar, whenever he came to Wyncote; and now for two Sundays he has been down and we have never seen him."

"Oh, no! you must be quite wrong.

Who could forget Rose? Why, when Mr. Wyncote was on the terrace with me on Sunday, I think we talked of no one but Rose. As for Miss Ashton, people must be quite mistaken," said Phœbe, eagerly, pained at the idea that any fault could be found with her hero.

"I must put it to rights if possible," she said to herself, when she had left Joanna. "Rose must look bright and happy again;" and, when George appeared again next Saturday, she hoped to see him desert the saloon and the terrace for the beech-tree avenue which led to the Coopers'.

But Miss Camilla's eye was upon him, and, even if he had wished to go, there was to be no escape from his attendance on Lydia and her father; and though Mr. Ashton's conversation would not have amused George Selwyn, would decidedly have failed at Holland House, and very much bored the squire, still there was a rough merit in it. Its charm for George

did not wear off, and homely communication with such a successful man was to him much like a conversation with a great political leader to an eager scholar fresh from Oxford.

So it required very little coercion on Miss Camilla's part to keep him at what she considered to be his post; and Phœbe sat in the window, on Sunday afternoon, lamenting George's apparent forgetfulness of Rose.

She took Fido out in the evening, and walked to the pond with him puffing after her; and when George joined her, as he had done on the terrace last Sunday evening, she would talk of nothing but Rose; and when George listened and smiled, and made her again describe the scene in the Via Condotti, she thought his interest was all for Rose's sake, and felt angry with her friend for having doubted him.

She did not remark that it was herself George liked to hear about; that he led

the conversation away from Rose to the cross Phœbe had tried to sell, to her life in the little saloon where he had seen her, to the villeggiaturas with her father and mother among the hills, to the last letter from the maestro; and as they sauntered up and down in the sweet evening air, with no spectators but the marble statues, with the rooks cawing above their heads as they crowded home to roost, and with the wood-pigeons cooing in the walnut-trees by the church, Phœbe felt that she was in a world of happiness.

As she took Fido up the steps again, and through the little door, she felt sure that all must come right now; for George was to be at the Hall with Mr. Ashton in the middle of the day on Thursday for Lady Wargrave's party, and when he met Rose at Foxlow all misunderstanding must vanish.

Besides, gossip would soon be at an end. Lydia was to return to the Mill House after the flower-show, and Rose would soon

see that there were no grounds for such a foolish report.

For Lydia's foot was well at last, and when Monday came she was allowed to walk. The squire begged to be allowed to lionize her over the village and church, to introduce her to the crusaders and the widows; and Lydia was flattered and pleased, though in her heart she would have preferred the younger Wyncote as a cicerone.

The widows received her graciously, and nodded their bonnets at each other more energetically than ever when the squire and Lydia disappeared through the little gate; for they had determined that she was to be George's wife.

The neighbours, led on by rumour and by sundry half-words of Lady Wargrave's, had decided it also; and the gossip had even reached London—indeed, it had reached all ears but George's; and he acquired fresh importance in the eyes of waiters and shop-

keepers—for was he not shortly to be a millionaire?

He imagined that the news of his rise in the commercial world had reached the west end, when he was suddenly treated in his club as some one worth knowing by determined money-lovers; and, proud of the importance he fancied he had won for himself, he walked back to his lodgings determined to win still more for Phœbe's sake.

And Phœbe, whose well-worn and much-washed white gowns had been a trouble to her ever since Lady Wargrave's invitation, was rejoicing, in her drab-coloured, wainscoted room, over a box, sent her by Rose, containing a muslin dress and a hat like the one she wore herself; and she could only think how good and kind Rose was, and wonder if she should ever be able to show her gratitude for her constant thoughtfulness.

The day of the party came at last, and

was as lovely as Lady Wargrave herself could desire.

The air, laden with the scent of lilies and honeysuckle, filled the saloon with summer sweetness as Phœbe, dressed in Rose's gift, stood before the empty fireplace and waited for Mrs. Wyncote.

As she stood there, with her back to the marble chimney-piece, she studied the other Phœbe reflected in the glass between the two opposite windows, and contrasted the bright, happy girl she saw there with the crumpled, miserable figure she had seen when she had first looked into the mirror in the month of May, which seemed such ages ago.

She wished her father could see her now: he would then know, better than letters could tell him, how happy she was, and how good every one was to her. She wished that George would arrive from London before any one else came into the room, that she might tell him how kind Rose had been.

Dear Rose, she thought, she will soon be happy now. She will soon see now how mistaken all the people have been in their gossiping story about George and Miss Ashton.

There was George's fly; but there also came Lydia, sailing into the saloon in a gown which, in its expensive simplicity, was a crowning effort of art; and there came the squire, paying her the most delicate compliments, and presenting her with roses, which his sister had budded, with a bow and manner worthy of Sir Charles Grandison.

By the time George and Mr. Ashton had reached the top of the stairs, every one had assembled; Mrs. Wyncote—complaining that George had hindered their starting earlier, that now they should be dreadfully late—and Miss Camilla herself, drawing a black shawl closely round her shoulders, the expensive Brussels lace contrasting strangely with the shabby black gown which was her best.

She was aware of the incongruity ; but, in her own eyes, Miss Wyncote of Wyncote was such an important person in the county —nay, in England, that her dress was a matter of no consequence whatever. She wore the shawl because she had inherited it with the fortune she had given to Piers ; and as for the gown, it was good enough, and she could fit out two school-girls for service for the same sum which a new one would cost.

“ Will you come with us ? ” asked Lydia of George, as they stood at the hall door preparing to start.

“ Certainly,” answered Miss Camilla for her nephew. “ George will be delighted.”

And George took his seat in front of Lydia with rather a bad grace, for he had been counting on this drive with Phœbe all the way from London, convinced that his uncle would prefer Lydia’s comfortable barouche to his own old-fashioned landau.

“ Drive slowly, Jenkins,” said Miss Ashton, settling herself in her corner and opening her

parasol ; and Jenkins indignantly reined in his thoroughbreds, and tried to keep at a proper distance behind the Wyncote carriage, which crept on along with horses as worn out as were Wyncote's fortunes.

Rose, standing with Joanna on the Foxlow lawn, saw the two carriages arrive, and saw George, in Mr. Ashton's barouche, talking to Lydia ; and, as they drove up to the house through the crowd already assembled, the neighbours saw him too, and jumped to the conclusion that the rumour was founded on fact.

"What a lovely day !" said Lady Wargrave, as she received them in the hall. "It seems made quite on purpose for me. You must come into the drawing-room at once, Mrs. Wyncote. I have collected so many old friends to see you, and you cannot catch cold there. I have had a special chair put on the lawn for you, Miss Ashton, and George must establish you there when you have seen the fruit and flowers. I think,

squire, you are positively the last of my guests, and I can tear myself away to come and look at them too. My lord has walked down to the farm with several people who are as fond of pigs and cows as he is; so do come with me, and help me to arrange extra prizes for poor, disappointed competitors;" and the whole party, with the exception of Mrs. Wyncote, filed off to the tenants' hall.

It had been an outbuilding years ago, but Lady Wargrave had dedicated it to the use of her poorer neighbours, and decorated it with antlers and coats-of-arms, and with a fine old carved chimney-piece, which reached to the ceiling.

There, ranged round the walls; were tables, and on the tables were the fruit, flowers, and vegetables exhibited by Foxlow and the neighbouring parishes.

There were early onions and carrots, peas and beans. There were nosegays of wild flowers, and selections of geraniums

and myrtles grown in cottage windows. There were little gardens, with miniature flower-beds, laid out with miniature paths between them. There was work from all the neighbouring schools, and Lady Wargrave at once directed her steps to the table where it lay, ready to provide any number of extra prizes, if a deserving Foxlow girl had been ill-treated.

" You must look at this work, Miss Ashton. I am very proud of my Foxlow children, and I see that the judges have not given them the first prize. Please, squire, will you write down on this card that I give two extra first-class prizes ? I cannot have my girls go away disappointed. It is dreadful to think how blind judges are sometimes. And these bouquets of flowers, I must have an extra prize here too. I am sure little Jane deserves it; don't you think so, Miss Ashton ? " And in this manner Lady Wargrave made her progress through the hall, shedding extra prizes on disappointed Foxlow

wherever she turned, and at last leaving the door at the opposite end with a beaming face.

Lydia followed her, with George, determined that, if she were ever mistress of Wyncote, she would have just such a flower-show, and patronize her neighbours, rich and poor.

And Mr. Ashton, as he escorted Miss Camilla, stopped at the different tables, weighed the carrots and admired the peas; and, as he looked at some small boy near him, was proud to think that he had started in life without even a fustian jacket such as the little urchin wore, and could now buy up most of the people whom he should presently see assembled on the lawn.

The remarks he made met with little response, for Miss Camilla was nervous and could only answer at random. She had made up her mind that the great question was to be settled to-day, and she could think of nothing else. And Phœbe, who was his other companion, was too much delighted

with the scene which was so unlike anything she had seen before, to notice that now and then, in default of a listener, he had turned to her.

The whole thing, besides being so new to her, was so picturesque. She was charmed with the antlers and the emblazoned shields above, and with the groups below; where the summer sunlight, streaming in on the village people in their best, standing at the tables discussing eagerly the merits of each exhibitor,—on the farmers' daughters in their smartest gowns,—on the couples walking up and down, engrossed in their own affairs,—and on the flowers and fruits, made up a bright picture such as she had not expected to see in England.

She was quite sorry when Miss Camilla followed Lady Wargrave through the door leading to the garden, where, frightened by the number of strangers she saw, she was thankful to take refuge by Rose's side.

Poor Rose hardly looked to-day like the

flower whose name she bore, as her eyes wandered to an acacia-tree opposite, beneath whose shade reclined Lydia in the garden-chair Lady Wargrave had promised her, while George sat by her side on the grass.

Rose could not see how impatient he was growing, and how ineffectual were Lydia's attempts to interest him in her conversation.

He was thinking how dull and stupid people were to leave him there alone, and not to come and relieve him from his attendance on the millionaire's daughter. His irritation grew excessive, when he heard a band strike up in a distant part of the garden, and saw Phœbe, with Rose and Joanna, get up and move away. He was determined to find an excuse to go off too, and a glance at the dining-room window decided the course he should take.

"You will like an ice, or a cup of coffee, I am sure, Miss Ashton," he said; "shall I fetch you one?" and Lydia, feeling that somehow or other conversation was impossible

to-day, said she would have an ice, and saw George depart, with the comfortable feeling that at any rate this was one means of keeping him by her side for a few more minutes.

“How do you think it is going on, Camilla?” asked Lady Wargrave, as she passed her on her way to receive a long, double file of school-children who had just arrived.

“I shall be so dreadfully disappointed if our plan fails,” said Miss Camilla in a shaking voice.

“Fail! how can it fail? Why should George and Miss Ashton have established themselves away from the rest of the world if it was going to fail?” answered Lady Wargrave, as she passed on, forgetting that the easy-chair had been placed under the acacia-tree out of a deep-laid policy of her own.

Before they had finished speaking George had reached the dining-room in search of Lydia’s ice, and, finding the room full, he leaned back against the wall to wait.

"Halloo, Wyncote!" said a friend coming up, "how are you? I saw you before, but did not like to interrupt you. Now that you have left the acacia-tree to refresh exhausted nature, I suppose I may congratulate you."

"Congratulate me!" asked George, in astonishment. "What about?"

"Oh! it's very well to make a mystery, when all the world knows you are engaged to Miss Ashton."

"I beg, then, that you will contradict the report," said George indignantly, as he took the ice a servant brought him, and looked round to see if there was no one to take it to Lydia but himself.

"Allow me to have the pleasure of carrying that ice to Miss Ashton," said his uncle, at his elbow. "You have danced attendance long enough, and are free to follow your inclination, which I suppose will draw you to the band;" and the squire, certain now of his success, took George's place by Lydia, making himself as delightful and entertaining as his nephew had been dull and stupid.

And Lydia, with her ready woman's wit, guessed what had happened; guessed, in short, that the gossip with which she had been made acquainted some days ago had reached George's ears, and had annoyed him.

She tried to smile at some joke of the squire's as she saw his nephew walk quickly away across the lawn; but she felt bitterly resentful at being rejected by the man she had half chosen—and had not an heiress, such as she was, a right to choose?

In the meantime the school-children were spreading themselves over the lawn, and Lady Wargrave was flitting here and there, anxious to make all happy, and finding it impossible to be in several places at once.

"Oh, Mrs. Cooper! where is Rose? I am sure she would help me in seeing that the children are amused," she said, as that lady came down a shady walk, accompanied by Mrs. Foster.

• "She will be delighted, I am sure, Lady Wargrave. They went across the lawn half

an hour ago. I wonder how I could find them?"

"I will look for them," said Mrs. Foster. "I was just thinking of strolling that way to find Dr. Foster."

"Will you tell Phoebe that I want her?" said Miss Camilla, anxious that her *protégée* should become initiated in all things connected with schools, which would form so important a part of her future duties.

"You are very kind, Mrs. Foster," said Lady Wargrave. "I am so much obliged to you. They will start the children in their games, I am sure. Ah, there is Mr. Browne. I thought you were going to play me false, Mr. Browne, and not come at all. You must now let me find Professor Rayleigh. He would have been in despair if you had failed us. I wonder where he is?" she finished, looking round delighted when Mr. Browne, proposing to find him for himself, walked off in a great hurry to consult the professor on a new theory relating to the worship of the

sun, which was beginning to replace the arrowheads in his brain.

And while Mrs. Foster went off in search of Rose and Phœbe, George had already joined them under the Spanish chestnuts, where they sat listening to the band; and was trying to calm his ruffled feelings, as he lay on the grass, picking to pieces the few daisies which had been forgotten by the mowing machine in the morning. It was a most irritating thing to have happened. Perhaps Phœbe had been deceived, as well as other people, and was imagining that his visits to Wyncote had been due to Lydia. He wished that he could tell her the truth; but if he spoke at all he must tell her more, and that, he felt, would hardly be honourable till he saw how his affairs were likely to stand.

If he had been alone with Rose he could have told her his annoyance: he had always made her his confidante since he first went to school; but there was no prospect of a quiet moment with her to-day, he thought, as he

sat and listened to the noisy waltz the band was playing. There were many other groups sitting and talking under the shade of the chestnut-trees, but there were few faces he knew except Dr. Foster's. He was sorry; for he would have liked all his acquaintances to have seen that he was no longer with Lydia.

As for Phœbe, she was listening to the music with delight. The waltz was one she had often heard when she had walked on the Pincio with her father, and she could think of him, quite happily since the maestro's last account, which had given a brilliant report as to his health and returning sight.

"You have never been to see us, George," said Joanna, as the music came to an end. "We thought that the fountain of Trevi had been filled with the water of Lethe, and that you had quite forgotten us."

The colour rushed to Rose's cheeks as Joanna spoke, and she put out her hand to silence her sister. But George saw neither the blush nor the gesture. He was trying to

remember what had prevented his going to the Coopers as usual.

"I am very sorry," he said; "but you know Mr. Ashton has been down each Sunday, and I was obliged to attend to him;" and then George plucked at the grass again, for he suddenly recollected all the obstacles that had been put in his way by Miss Camilla, and he could now plainly see the net which she had spread for him.

"Phœbe," said Mrs. Foster, as she came up to them, "Miss Camilla begged me to say that she wished to speak to you; and Lady Wargrave will be much obliged, Rose, if you and Joanna will help to amuse the school-children."

"Oh, Rose has a headache, and must not stand in the hot sun," answered Joanna, springing up. "Come, Phœbe, you and I will make ourselves useful enough for three people;" and, drawing Phœbe's arm in hers, she walked away over the sunny lawn, proud of her diplomacy which had left Rose to a *tête-à-tête* with George.

The band struck up again; and Mrs. Foster found some friends and forgot to look after the doctor, who had wandered away on her appearance; and Rose leaned back in the garden-seat, silently happy, enjoying the music, the cool shade, and the flickering lights, which fell through the chestnut leaves upon the grass, and wishing life could flow on like this for ever.

"Rose," began George, when the music stopped again, "I hope you have not misunderstood me, as other people have done."

"In what way?" asked Rose, blushing violently, and instantly guessing his meaning.

"I mean about Miss Ashton. I have been horribly annoyed at some folly a fellow said to me just now."

"I had heard some gossip about it, George. People will talk, you know."

"Yes! but I should be so vexed if you, and—any one else—any one else, whose opinion I cared for, had believed it, Rose."

"We did half believe it," answered Rose

in a low voice ; "but it is all right now, George."

"And you will explain it all," said he eagerly.

"Oh yes !" answered Rose, thinking that he meant Joanna, and surprised at his thinking so much of her opinion ; and, satisfied with her answer, he changed the subject, and, leaving off pulling up Lady Wargrave's grass, told her of the step he had made in his fortunes, and how bright his future was.

His future was not brighter than Rose's present. As she sat under the flickering shade of the chestnut trees, listening to his voice, she could have sung for joy. After all, he had not forgotten her. He had even taken the trouble to explain his conduct to her ; and, while she dreamed the happy dreams which have been dreamed so often, Phœbe and Joanna were making the younger children swing in the great boat-swing under the elms, and teaching the others to play games.

Miss Camilla was delighted when she saw the vigour and enjoyment Phœbe showed in threading-the-needle and dropping-the-hand-kerchief. If only Mr. Browne could see her now, he must feel that as a vicar's wife she would be invaluable. And there, at the right moment, came Mr. Browne, walking with the professor, but thinking, though Miss Camilla knew it not, neither of schools nor Phœbe, nor, indeed, of anything more modern than menhirs and cromlechs. Miss Camilla saw his eyes rest upon Phœbe in an absent manner, and then wander to the school-children, and she imagined that her plan was ripening; whilst, in reality, Mr. Browne was speculating as to the antiquity of the particular game at which they were playing, and wondering whether he could trace it back to early ages, and to an invocation to the sun. But, happily, Miss Camilla could not know this. She was already uneasy enough at missing George from under the acacia-tree, and at seeing Lydia surrounded by a number of people

to whom she was talking eagerly ; for Lord Wargrave had reappeared from his farm with his cattle-loving friends, and the popular squire was soon the centre of a group, and making himself more fascinating than ever.

And Lydia was beginning to forget her annoyance, and to wonder whether, after all, things were not turning out for the best. Though the squire was more than thirty years older than herself, he was not an old man. It was evident that he held, and could give his wife, the position which she, Lydia Ashton, coveted ; by marrying his uncle she would annoy George, and after the way he had slighted her a little vengeance would be delightful. So she asked the squire in her sweetest manner to take the vacant seat in the barouche going home, and, when they had dropped him at the lodge gate, she drove on with her father to the Mill House, feeling once more calm and content.

She read her afternoon letters as Mr. Ashton turned over the evening papers, and

was so engrossed with the thoughts of the future position she was planning to herself, that she hardly heeded the remarks he made.

" You are not attending to me, Lydia," he said at length, in a louder key. " Did you hear me say that they talk of Baldwin for a peerage? What folly! he has only two-thirds of my income. Why should I not become a peer, Lydia, as well as he? Why not? "

" It would be very little good, papa, as you have only a daughter."

" Yes, yes! of course that would make it all the more possible. The title would die with me, but it would be something to be able to say, ' I began my life sweeping out a shop, and I end it in the House of Lords.' "

CHAPTER X.

WHILE Lydia Ashton turned over her letters, and the squire lounged home through the avenue, dreaming of covers and unlimited pheasants of his own, the occupants of the Wyncote carriage were being dragged, slowly and very silently, back from Foxlow.

Very silently, for Mrs. Wyncote slept, and Miss Camilla sat stiffly upright, with her lips compressed, longing to be alone with George, and able to pour the vials of her wrath upon his head. For Lydia's invitation to the squire had opened her eyes to the fact that George had intentionally deserted his post under the acacia-tree.

As for George, he leaned back against the opposite seat, with his arms crossed, equally indignant with his aunt for having

worked, as he considered in an underhand manner, to link his name with Miss Ashton's. Phoebe, though this storm was unperceived by her, could not be the first to speak, so she sat in her corner of the carriage quietly happy, enjoying every turn of the road which brought fresh pictures before her eyes. Now and again, where the hedges were low, she could see green fields bathed in the evening light, where the cows flapped their tails lazily under the shade of the trees; now a cottage, with its porch covered with honeysuckle, stood away from the road within its little garden; and now, through an open gate, was a vista of acres of golden corn, nearly ready for the sickle.

What a happy day she had had! and how kind it had been of Miss Camilla to have given her this pleasure! How many people would have said that their carriage was full already, and have made that an excuse for leaving her at home! and, as she thought of this, she remembered with compunction how

untidily she had left some drawings and paint-brushes on a table by the window in the saloon ; and, knowing that this would annoy Miss Camilla, she resolved to put it all to rights before she took off her hat.

So, as soon as the carriage reached the hall door, and Mrs. Wyncote had been helped to her room, in a half-awakened state, without wasting a moment she ran upstairs, and began to put her brushes away as hastily as she could.

The table on which they lay was in the shade of the curtain, and, as the sun was setting now behind the trees, Phœbe was hidden in the deep shadow, so that Miss Camilla and George were in the room, standing near the fireplace, without perceiving her. She proceeded to arrange her paint-box noiselessly, when she was startled by Miss Camilla's voice ; and the first words she uttered made Phœbe feel that she ought not to be there, and made her long to fly to her own room ; but the voice was so stern that it

frightened her, and she did not dare to move.

"I am expecting an explanation, George," said Miss Camilla. "You have offended Miss Ashton in some way. If you can tell me what you have done, there may yet be time to apologize, and everything may go on as it did before."

"I am sorry that you think I have offended Miss Ashton," answered George haughtily; "but I cannot imagine that any conduct of mine can affect her in any way. Your fancying that it does so makes me suppose that it is you, Aunt Camilla, who have allowed the report to be spread of my being engaged to her; a report equally unfair to both her and me."

"Why should it not be true?" said Miss Camilla, in great agitation. "What is there unfair in supposing that you have a wish to restore the family, and have money enough to rebuild Wyncote?"

"You have hinted at some marriage of

the kind before now, Aunt Camilla; and I have always said that I will not sacrifice my own happiness by marrying merely for money."

"But it would not be marrying merely for money, George," and Miss Camilla's sternness melted into entreaty. "Lydia is handsome and clever. She is all you could wish your wife to be; and the Wyncotes would hold up their heads once more, and the old place—George, cannot you sacrifice something for the old place?"

"I would not make this sort of sacrifice, Aunt Camilla. I will work hard and do my best to save money enough, if possible, to put everything in order, if ever I come into the property; but a man's life is his own. Why should I spoil mine to make up for my uncle's folly?"

"But the old place, George,—the old place," almost sobbed Miss Camilla,—"am I to feel that there is no hope that you will not think better of this? I can put all straight

with Lydia ; only say that you will change your mind. Others have spoiled their lives, as you call it, for the sake of a home like this, and have lived lonely and sad ; and I only ask you to think twice before you say that all this money, which you could have for the asking, is to be thrown away, when it would rebuild Wyncote."

"I am very sorry, Aunt Camilla ; but I have said the last word. Even if it is true, as you say, that Miss Ashton would do me the honour to accept me, I do not desire to run the risk ; and that there may be no mistake in the matter, no possibility of her name being again talked of in connection with mine, I shall be off at once. I can just catch the evening train. Symonds can send my portmanteau to-morrow ;" and George was gone, leaving Miss Camilla standing bewildered on the hearthrug, and Phœbe still in the shadow of the curtain, too frightened to move.

As his steps sounded down the oak

stairs, Miss Camilla sank into her mother's arm-chair, and clasped her hands.

So her dream was over, and her hope gone. So Wyncote must linger on, growing more tumble-down year by year, the cottages and farms must fall to pieces, the sacrifice of her life be wasted.

Two months ago she was satisfied merely to have saved the place from utter ruin : now that her recent hopes of seeing it restored to its old glory were dashed to the ground, she felt as if the ruin had come.

She saw herself living on to old age, struggling with poverty, unable, when once her mother was dead and her jointure swept into the squire's pocket, to help her poor neighbours in their need, out of the small sum Piers would allow her.

For one moment she said to herself, as she had said once before, two months ago, that she had sacrificed her happiness in vain.

But this thought was treason to Piers. She must be reasonable. It was George who

had offended, not her brother. Things were no worse than they had been before. She must be brave ; and Miss Camilla roused herself, gathered up her shawl, and walked steadily out of the saloon and down the passage.

Phœbe breathed again. She would have given a good deal not to have been in the saloon to overhear a conversation not meant for her ; but, after all, she could not regret it. Sorry as she felt for Miss Camilla, she could only rejoice in knowing George to be as noble as she had imagined him to be—so true to himself, and so true, she thought, to Rose.

No hero that she had called out of the shadows, as she had sat at work by Miss Camilla's side, had spoken words like these.

And he was going away, and she should not see him again for so long, as, of course, he would dislike coming back to Wyncote with Lydia at the Mill House. She must see him again ; he would not have started

yet; she would have time to reach the gallery, and could watch him as he went down the road between the oak-trees.

So, shutting up her paint-box, she went softly down the saloon to the door which George had left open behind him, and stood upon the landing.

He had not gone yet. She could hear him speaking to Symonds in the hall, and she thought she should have time to reach the gallery before he started, when his steps sounded on the stairs. She turned quickly towards the saloon, lest he should ask her why she was standing there in the twilight, when, before she had time to reach the door, George was by her side.

"I thought I heard the rustle of your gown," he said hurriedly, "and I am come to say good-bye. It will be a long time before I am back again."

"You have no time to spare, Mr. George, if you wish to catch the train," said Symonds, from below.

"I am coming. Good-bye, then, Phœbe."

He had never called her by her name before, and she looked up at him wonderingly. Other words seemed upon his lips, but Symonds opened the hall door with a clanking noise, as another reminder, and George was gone.

What had he been going to say? Some message to Rose, perhaps; and Phœbe, wondering why her cheeks burned and her heart beat, crept through the deepening shadows to the gallery window. She could just see him disappearing at the turning beyond the oak-trees; and then, suddenly frightened at being alone among this long array of dead Wyncotes, she regained the saloon and her own room.

"So George is gone," said the squire, as they sat at dinner. "I thought that he had arranged to stay till Monday, at any rate.

"It is all this tiresome business," said Mrs. Wyncote, who had been roused from her sleepy condition by dressing. "It is

all this business. In my young days young men amused themselves; now, George is always at work. It is all business. Mr. Ashton never seems at home. It would have been very dull for Lydia if she had sprained her foot at home. And, of course, in every way being here has been a great advantage to her. It has been a great thing for her to have got accustomed to our ways of thinking and speaking. I gave her a good many hints as to behaviour, Piers, and she thanked me. Of course, it was a great advantage."

The squire evidently found the subject a distasteful one, for he began to ask Camilla, who sat by silent and troubled, some questions as to the neighbours they had met at Foxlow; and, by adroitly bringing in a bit of London gossip, Mrs. Wyncote's ear was caught, and her attention turned from Miss Ashton.

The squire's spirits, however, seemed to have gone; he stood on the hearthrug and

arranged his white waistcoat in the glass opposite, as he had done before Lydia came, and again found fault with Camilla and her occupations. But still he was at Wyncote. He had been there a fortnight already, and showed no signs of restlessness; he had made Mr. Browne a promise of reflooring the school at his own expense, and actually, the day after the Foxlow flower-show, had looked at the cottage by the pond, and talked of repairs.

So, through all her disappointment, she felt that she ought to be thankful and satisfied. She was angry with herself for being only half pleased now with what a month ago would have made her joyful; but she never spoke of George, and only showed her remembrance of his offence by asking Lydia to the Hall every day, and treating her with the greatest tenderness.

Poor Lydia! Had not the great good fortune of being mistress of Wyncote hovered before her eyes, only to vanish like a mirage?

And Lydia received her pity and tenderness gratefully, and understood its origin. She was always asking Miss Camilla's advice about the management of her house, the villagers who needed help, and the class she should take in the school. And the squire was always near, evidently anxious, his sister thought, to make up for George's desertion, to carry her camp-stool, to recommend drives, to advise the purchase of a pony-carriage, and even, when it arrived, to act as charioteer.

But if Miss Camilla could not forgive George, neither could she forgive Rose. If she had been out of the way George would have been more tractable with regard to the heiress ; and, in her displeasure, she engrossed Phœbe's time and kept her away from her friend ; and it was only now and then that Phœbe could get away to the lawn under the cedar-tree, to listen to Rose's perpetual wonder at George's disappearance.

"I think it must have been something

about Miss Ashton," Rose would say. "He was annoyed at people having said he was going to marry her;" and, as Rose remembered the afternoon at Foxlow, her cheeks flushed and her eyes brightened, and Phoebe was satisfied that the flower-show had smoothed all misunderstandings.

July ended and August began, the fields glowed with their golden harvest, and the squire was still at Wyncote.

Miss Camilla almost forgot her disappointment, as she watched him taking an interest in his property at last, and making notes of tumbledown farms and broken fences. Indeed, the twelfth of August was actually near, and she had heard no hint of his going to Scotland.

She wondered what could have wrought this change, as she came upon the terrace after her afternoon's business. It had been an idle day with her, for gleaning had begun, and the village was deserted. She had sat by the bedside of the sick girl in the wretched

cottage by the pond till five o'clock, and had now returned to the Hall with nothing particular to do, only to find Mrs. Wyncote still out driving with Phoebe and Fido.

So, waiting for them, she walked up and down the terrace under the old house, a pleasure she rarely allowed herself time for; and, as she walked along, the remembrance of her childish days came back to her as though they had been yesterday. Here she had played at ball with Stephen and run races with Piers; here they had fed the peacocks and taught generations of dogs to fetch and carry; and here were the marks still left of a stone, aimed at a bird by Piers, which had struck one of the carved lions instead, and produced a star-shaped wound, which had caused her weeks of anxiety lest it should be discovered.

How long ago those days were! How very long her life had been! Would she shape it differently if it were hers to live over again? would she again give up her future

for her brother's sake? she wondered, as she leaned on the balustrade, and looked over the garden.

Yes, she would. What would she not do, over and over again, to save Wyncote? And perhaps she had saved more than that. Perhaps it was owing to her self-denial that, after all these years, Piers was showing signs of becoming a changed and unselfish man. Could she repent of any deed which had brought this to pass?

She looked down the yew walk which led straight away from the terrace steps, and saw him coming.

What a feeling of peace and content it gave her to have him come back, day after day, as if Wyncote was again the home it had been in his boyhood! And what a home it was! Could such a quaint old garden and house be found anywhere else in England? No, it was impossible; and, as the squire came out of the shade of the yews and walked up the terrace steps, he

looked satisfied and happy, as if he thought so too.

"You there, Camilla?" he said, as he reached the top. "I was wondering where you were. What a lovely afternoon it has been! A great deal wants doing here, Camilla," he proceeded, leaning against the balustrade and looking down the long row of mullioned windows. "There is a great deal of pointing needed to the stone-work, and that door is rather in a bad state. Not but what we must begin first with the inside: it is the most important of the two. And the roof and chimneys—of course they must be looked to at once."

Camilla raised her eyes to her brother's face in mute astonishment. Was he going mad? or had he taken to gambling—the thing she dreaded most—and made a sudden hit? No; the last idea was as impossible as the first. No Wyncote had ever gone mad, and Piers had not stirred from home, to gamble.

"I see you are puzzled, Camilla, and are wondering where the money is to come from. The statues down the yew walk are very dilapidated; but they, I fear, must wait till next year. Well, Camilla, not guessed yet? 'Je vous le donne en trois; je vous le donne en quatre,' like Madame de Sevigny."

"You have given up your share in the moor?"

"Wrong, Camilla. That kind of self-denial would hardly rebuild Wyncote. I gave you more credit for discernment, I see, than you deserved. I am engaged to Miss Ashton."

Camilla was silent. Piers, an elderly man, whom she had considered a hopeless bachelor long ago, to marry Lydia Ashton, a girl nearly young enough to be his granddaughter! Her first feeling was one of utter astonishment.

"She is very young, Piers," she said hurriedly.

"She is old for her age, and young

enough for me to train into what my wife should be," answered Piers. "Of course you naturally feel that my marriage puts you on one side, Camilla; but Lydia is good tempered, and easy to live with. You will get on well together, and, as she said just now, you will always be a welcome guest. Of course the old man loves making money, but he is not likely to disturb himself as to how it is spent. He was speaking very generously this afternoon before I left, and says that he shall devote the sum with which he should have bought a new place to repairing this. I consider that I have done a very wise thing. Even you must think so, Camilla. Why, Wyncote will be put in order without my having to inconvenience myself in the least; but there are the carriage wheels. I must tell my mother," and the squire sauntered away, with his head erect and his manner that of a conqueror, for he felt that he had conquered fortune.

Miss Camilla stood and looked after him,

and then slowly walked away also. He had said she would be a welcome guest. Why had he used the word "guest"? You did not do so to one who was at home. Of course the word was a mistake; but she must be alone, to think the matter over.

Why had she used her utmost ingenuity to secure Lydia for George, feeling almost heart-broken when he had thwarted her, only to shrink now from the same Lydia as a wife for her brother?

She questioned herself as to the reason again and again, as she turned the corner of the house by the tower, and walked down the carriage-road between the old oaks to the gate in the iron railing. She leaned against the post, and looked over the fields, which had changed from the tender green they had worn the day that Phœbe came, into a sea of gold, stretching away into the distance in uninterrupted glory, only broken here and there by shocks of yellow corn piled together.

As she stood and looked, she forgot her-

self for a moment in the perfect beauty of the scene which lay before her,—but only for a moment, for, as she looked, the church bell began to toll. It was the gleaning-bell, which tolled every evening through harvest-time at six o'clock; and as the first stroke sounded over the yellow corn from the church tower among the walnut-trees, each gleaner in the farther field raised herself from her work, and not another ear was gathered; for might not some bird of the air carry the news of such ill-doing to Miss Camilla?

For Miss Camilla had revived this old custom, which had long fallen into disuse, for the benefit of the far-off parishioners, and to the great displeasure of those near at hand; and, as the strokes followed each other in quick succession, they seemed to be reminding her of the power she had had, and, as they died away, to toll the words, “a welcome guest!”

The gleaners were now coming home, along the pathway through the standing corn,

towards the gate on which she leaned, the women with their bonnets hanging on one arm, while the other held the load of golden corn steady on their heads.

Some were tired and silent, some laughing and talking, all of them women whose girlhood she had trained, who had looked upon her as an oracle, to whom her will was law.

Would it be the same now? Would not Lydia take her place? Would not Lydia's will be law henceforward?

She turned from the gate and walked back to the house. She had discovered why she shrank from this good fortune for Piers. She, who had all her life set herself up as a guide to others, was jealous of Lydia; but this must not be. How she would despise another for such a feeling! How unfair it was to Piers to allow such a thing as that to interfere with satisfaction at his happiness, with satisfaction that the home she loved would be saved from ruin. Money had not come

too soon, she thought, as she went up the creaking stairs, and remarked the cracks in the portraits of the old Wyncotes. Another few years and it would almost have been too late, she said to herself, as she opened the door into the saloon.

“Oh, Camilla, how long you have been! I have been waiting here quite half-an-hour to ask if you have seen Piers,” said her mother from her arm-chair in the window. “Now you are come, you can give me your arm to help me to my room. Of course Piers has told you. Were you not astonished? I must look out the family lace to-morrow. It has been laid by ever since Piers came of age. I remember I wore it then. It is a great comfort, Camilla, to think that Lydia has lived with us a fortnight, and has got accustomed to our ways,” she added, as she reached her room.

“I am going to look out the family lace to-morrow, Piers,” she repeated at dinner. “I remember the first time I wore it was

when I was presented on my marriage. I wonder who will present Lydia. What a comfort that we have had her here for a whole fortnight! it will have trained her a little;" and she looked at her knife and fork as she spoke, as if she imagined that Lydia Ashton's education had been Chinese, and that till she had come to Wyncote she had eaten dinner with chopsticks.

Camilla exerted herself to be pleasant next morning. She went from the cellars to the attics with Piers, making notes of needed repairs. She welcomed Lydia to luncheon, and shielded her from Mrs. Wyncote's advice as to behaviour and manners. She sat patiently through congratulatory visits from Mrs. Foster and Mrs. Cooper; for of course the news had travelled rapidly. She even had so far recovered herself that, while Mrs. Cooper sat by Mrs. Wyncote's side, she could make fresh plans for George; and, remembering what a different position he would now be in, and what an addition four

hundred pounds a year would be to his income, she once more received Rose into favour.

And Rose, who had retreated to Phœbe's side, and who was fond of Miss Camilla, was glad to be spoken kindly to once more, and listened with a blushing face as Miss Camilla mentioned George, and feared that he would not be back again before Christmas, as he had undertaken some journey upon business.

The Coopers and Mrs. Foster had hardly left before Lady Wargrave arrived, in a hurry as usual, and with more visits crowded into one afternoon than she could ever hope to pay, but who had heard the news and had hastened to congratulate Camilla.

"It is the most fortunate thing in the world," she said, as she settled herself by her friend's side. "I think it is even better than if all this money had come to George. Everything can be put to rights at once, and I shall dance in the gallery at Christmas, as I said I should. I shall always feel that Wyncote owes its prosperity to us for

recommending the Mill House to Mr. Ashton."

Lady Wargrave's delight was infectious, and Miss Camilla was almost happy again next day when Mr. Browne appeared, to show the first proofs of his book to Phœbe.

She was able to appear quite unruffled when, on the squire's entrance, he discussed the affairs of the school with the vicar, and swept away her economical plan of ventilation. He spoke, indeed, as if he had the purse of Fortunatus, and, as each day passed, behaved as if he thought so too, for every evening he planned fresh repairs, as though he had only to stretch out his hand to receive cheque after cheque from an unquestioning father-in-law, as if Mr. Ashton were to make the gold which he, the squire, was to spend.

But his dream was of short duration.

"Papa is going to give himself a holiday to-morrow," said Lydia, turning to him as she sat at luncheon in the tapestry-room at

the Hall, after she and the squire had been engaged a week. "He says that he would like to look over the house with you, and settle about repairs."

"I shall be delighted to see him," said the squire affably. "As for repairs, I have already arranged them in my own mind, but shall be most happy to show him what must be done. I shall be disengaged about eleven, if that time will suit him."

And by eleven o'clock the squire had smoked his cigar, had written a few business letters (it was quite a new sensation to him, and a delightful one, to have business to write about), and was studying the *Times* in the saloon, waiting for his visitor.

He read carefully now every article on the rise and fall of wages; he looked with interest at the state of the cattle and wheat market; for was he not going to become once again a landed proprietor, with labourers, wheat, and cattle, to be interested in?

"Mr. Ashton," announced Symonds, as the stable clock struck eleven.

"The soul of punctuality, you see, squire," said Mr. Ashton. "I hope you will find the same habit implanted in my daughter; punctuality as to hours, and punctuality in paying her bills, though you might say that the latter will depend mostly on my punctuality in supplying her with money to do so. May I introduce Mr. Dobell, of the house of Dobell and Scott, who has been kind enough to come down to assist me in planning the restoration of this house? Mr. Dobell is a person of great experience. I forget where you have been last, Mr. Dobell."

"At Menteith Castle," answered the upholsterer, who, having bowed low to Mrs. Wyncote, Miss Camilla, and the squire, had now fixed his eye-glass in the corner of his eye, and was intently engaged in studying the cornice and ceiling of the saloon. "The marquis always begs that I should come myself. He says, 'Mr. Dobell, I am sorry to trouble you to take so long a journey, but I have no confidence in subalterns.'"

"Yes, squire, it is as a great favour that Mr. Dobell has come down here to-day. Where shall we begin—at the top of the house? Will you lead the way?"

The squire was aghast. To have an upholsterer brought down from London to be consulted as to the decoration and repairs of his own house—to be asked to lead the way—to be told when to move! Surely no Wyncote had ever been so treated before!

But elaborate courtesy, practised for more than thirty years, trains a man to bear annoyance without shrinking; and with a smiling face, and a manner which, by its condescension, awed Mr. Dobell, he opened the door and led the way to the roof.

He had to remember the million of money which hung on his civility when Mr. Ashton lamented over the state of the beams, and deplored the neglect of so many years, and the consequent heavy present expense, and when Mr. Dobell dotted down, almost without consulting him, what

should be preserved and what must be swept away.

"I wish," said the squire at last, as they stood in the gallery, and Mr. Dobell's pencil was making rapid notes in his little book, "I wish to have all the inhabited part of the house restored, it is true, but with all the characteristics of each room thoroughly preserved."

"Exactly so, exactly," said Mr. Dobell. "But, my dear sir, we must consider first of all what was the character of each room in the first instance. Now, here the walls would have been covered with tapestry. The ceiling and window shutters have been picked out with gold. You can still trace the armorial bearings on the ceiling, if you look closely. The pictures interfere with carrying out the idea of tapestry, but we shall restore the armorial bearings. The effect of the room will then be, to a certain degree, like one at Menteith Castle. Pardon me, Mr. Ashton, when I use the words 'to a certain

degree;' but it is impossible to equal the splendour of the Castle. As the marquis observed one day, 'Mr. Dobell, my house is furnished with the wreck of empires.' It is a pity that we can use no coronets here; it is such a finish to a room," Mr. Dobell ended, with a sigh.

The sigh was echoed by Mr. Ashton, who, though he was satisfied that Lydia should please herself, yet would have been happier if his money had gone to restore an earl's house instead of one belonging to a simple squire; and the squire still smiled a conventional smile, though his house, the show-place of the county, was spoken of with a certain amount of pity, and though his arms, with all their quarterings, were supposed to need a coronet to give them *éclat*.

"And the saloon," said Mr. Dobell. "I dotted down a few remarks as to the style of the saloon. May we return there? Ah, yes," he went on, with his eye-glass up, "I remember now. I have marked down the

saloon as crimson and gold, the ceiling to be gilt wherever the ornaments admit of it, and the feeling of crimson continued up into the cornice."

"You will never change the yellow curtains, Piers!" broke in Miss Camilla from her writing-table, while Mrs. Wyncote left off listening to Phoebe, who was halfway through a leading article. "We should hardly know the house again with such an alteration as that."

"I think, Mr. Ashton, that we must keep this room as it is," said the squire.

"Quite impossible, my dear sir," said Mr. Dobell. "Only imagine what the effect would be of leaving the principal room in the house untouched! On the contrary, it must be the gem of the whole; the centre of all other decoration. And we shall only be restoring it to what it must originally have been. These yellow curtains are of a very late date. I should have to throw up the whole undertaking, Mr. Ashton. Were the

saloon left alone it would be only half doing the business, Mr. Ashton."

"And I never have done things by halves," said the millionaire, frightened at the idea of Mr. Dobell retiring.

"No, no, squire; let us do it thoroughly now we are about it. Pray write down crimson and gold, Mr. Dobell."

The squire said no more, but led the way down the staircase, which was given a place in the note-book by Mr. Dobell, and bowing them through the front door, which Symonds held open, returned with slow steps to the saloon. This visit was the first drop in his cup of prosperity — harbinger, perhaps, of many more.

Were the days of his freedom over? Had he sold himself for a million of money?

"Oh, Piers," said Camilla entreatingly, as he reached the saloon and, standing pensively before the looking-glass, arranged his waist-coat carefully, "you will be firm about this room; you will not have it changed?"

" My dear Camilla," answered the squire, " be reasonable. For myself, I shall take a leaf out of my future father-in-law's book, and say my maxim is to take things easily; and after all, Camilla, it is sentiment, and yellow curtains against a million of money. ' Pour faire les omelettes il faut casser des œufs.' "

END OF VOL. I.



